

SIXTY YEARS OF RECOLLECTIONS



TRANSLATED, WITH NOTES, BY ALBERT D. VANDAM.
EDITOR OF
"AN ENGLISHMAN IN PARIS."



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OF
RECOLLECTIONS

BY
M. ERNEST LEGOUVÉ
Of the Académie-Française

TRANSLATED, WITH NOTES, BY
ALBERT D. VANDAM
The Editor of 'An Englishman in Paris'

IN TWO VOLUMES



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SIXTY YEARS OF RECOLLECTIONS



INTRODUCTION

A CONVERSATION WITH STE-BEUVE

ONE day Ste-Beuve said to me, ‘I never speak of a writer until I have found the central point of his work, the dominant trait of his character; that is why I have not taken you up before as the subject of an essay. My perception of you was not sufficiently clear, but now I may begin; I fancy “I’ve got hold of you.”’

‘Well,’ I replied, ‘seeing that you have got hold of me, tell me what I am, give me a definition of myself.’

‘It is the simplest thing in the world. That which strikes one most forcibly in you is the “unity” of your life. You have travelled along roads, very different from one another, but the aim pursued was always the same. You belong to the race which considers well before it acts. You traced your plan of existence

from your youth, like the dramatist traces the plan of his play, and you proceeded towards the *dénouement* with a firm step, a confident look, without being beguiled by the incidents on the road ; you are, in short, the child of your own will.'

'This is certainly a very flattering portrait,' I said, laughing. 'Coming from such a sagacious observer it is singularly calculated to tickle my vanity, everything that looks like power does flatter us. Unfortunately, the portrait has a very grave fault, it is not a bit like me. I am absolutely the very opposite of it. It is not I who have guided my life, it is my life which has guided me. I am not at all the child of my own will, I am the pupil of my affections, that is, of the friends whom luck threw in my way. There is no doubt that in my youth I fostered some very ambitious aims, that I had within me a greater or lesser provision of sentiments, tastes and ideas of which my life has been the realisation, because we are, after all, but the development of ourselves ; at the same time there is not a single phase of that development in which I did not find an auxiliary, sometimes an initiator. There is a vast difference between such a man and the one your imagination has evolved out of me ; a man "made of one piece," master of himself, absolutely controlling his life. Of course I am the loser by it, but in truth, if ever I write my recollections, I ought to subscribe them :— "*The Memoirs of Others*".' Thereupon we said good-

bye. Ste-Beuve did not write the article. I had probably destroyed his illusions with regard to me, and I myself thought no more of this conversation.

To-day, when, solicited by some friends and feeling that I have not much time to lose, I write at the top of a sheet of blank paper—the first of a thick pile—the title of this book: ‘Sixty Years of Recollections,’ I feel strangely moved, and my conversation with Ste-Beuve recurs to me. I feel certain that at the time my words were perfectly sincere, yet they were, perhaps, uttered at random, without much reflection, as happens now and then in a familiar chat.

To-day I come back to them in a more sober frame of mind, and repeat them as I will, weigh them as I may, they assume to me the character of absolute truth. They supply the very portrait of my life. The reader may judge for himself.

Few people are unacquainted with that delightful chapter of the Bible where the son of Tobias, about to undertake a long and perilous journey, finds in the market-place a young man of handsome mien and his loins girded, ready to take the road, who offers himself as a guide.* Now, without the least attempt at comparison or pretension to be considered a biblical personage, I never read that chapter without applying the story to myself.

In literature I have pursued very widely divergent paths, and it is only later in life that my mental

* It is not in our Bible, but in the Apocrypha. Tobit, ch. v.—TR.

unity has become patent to myself from the very diversity in the nature of my work. My character, like my mind, has only been formed bit by bit ; side by side with my love of literature, I had a taste, I might say an intense passion, for music and for the practice of arms ; side by side with my physical and moral existence I organised the family life. As a husband, father and grandfather I have experienced the rapturous joys and bitter griefs implied in those names ; no one has enjoyed and suffered more than I have, no one has had sweeter compensations for seemingly endless sorrows. Well, in that series of vicissitudes and transformations of all kinds, there has ever come to me, at the crucial moment, either in the form of a young man or an old man, obscure or illustrious as the case might be, an *envoy* who has served me as a guide.

The reason, then, of my taking up my pen is the desire to resuscitate those dear and various envoys ; as I have seen and known them, without resorting to grateful flattery, but in 'their habit as they lived.' This book shall be the picture of a human soul, shaping itself in the contact with other souls nearly always superior to it, a biography mingled with other biographies, the personages of which will take their places in due sequence in the framework of the period in which each of them lived, and in that way will throw a certain light on the character of that period. I will say something about myself in order to say a

great deal about them. I will be, as it were, the frame, they shall be the picture.

Can such a book be interesting? I am not without hope in that respect, but I should like it to be something more than that. At the stage of life at which I have arrived, a man feels the need of doing something useful and beneficial to a section of his fellow-beings, if he do aught at all; he feels the necessity of being able to say at his exit, 'It was, after all, better that I did live.' ('I have not lived in vain.')

This will be my ambition with regard to these recollections. I should like them to do some good. Let me explain.

However fortunate my acquaintanceships in life may have been, I should be sorry to include myself deliberately in the category of those who deserve to be treated with exceptional favour by Providence, by His inconveniencing His envoys for them. What happened to me must have happened to many others; the history of my life is very probably like the history of everyone else. Yes, I firmly believe that every one of us, in looking back on the course of his life, will become convinced that, no matter what his profession or rank, no matter what trials he experienced, he has, at the critical moment, beheld a hand, heard a voice which pointed out his path to him and sometimes offered to guide him along it.

The great thing is to be able to recognise that voice, to follow the direction of that hand, and after

the service has been rendered, to render it to others in return. No doubt, the maxim, 'Do not unto others what thou wouldst not wish to be done unto thee,' is a very profound one, but not less efficient is the one which enjoins us, 'To do unto others the good that has been done unto us.' The giver is as much the gainer by it as the receiver. The help one gives becomes sometimes the help one receives.

This, then, is the dream I cherished with regard to this book, this is the impression I would like to leave upon the reader, that sympathy is a surer guide in life than scepticism, that faith is not a gull's creed, that side by side with the traps and snares, with which, alas, the earth is riddled, there are fortunate acquaintanceships which come to us as a stay and an example; that, to come back to our delightful chapter in Tobit, there is not a single one of us, but who can and must at this or that moment play in turn the part of the son of Tobias and that of the angel.

CHAPTER I

A Ceremony at the Academy.—Sixteen years after.—Népomucène Lemer cier. — My Grandmother. — Dr Gall. — A Prophecy. — A friendly, but limited audience.—Poetry and Roasted Potatoes.—M. Legouvé's First Poem. — He sends it to Casimir Delavigne.—Historical Verdicts.—Delavigne's 'Ecole des Vieillards'.—Talma. —Mdlle. Mars.—A Letter from Casimir Delavigne.—A Portrait of Casimir Delavigne. — Béranger and the would-be Poet. — M. Legouvé makes up his mind to compete for the Prize-Poem of the Academy.

I

THE first time I went to the Academy was on the 15th April 1813. I was six years old and in mourning for my father and mother. I was taken thither by my grandparents, and when we got to the hall in which the meetings are held, we were met at the top of the staircase leading to the entrance of the central seats by a gentleman wearing *l'habit à la française*,* knee breeches, frilled shirt and ruffles, and sword dangling by his side. He conducted us to the reserved seats and I was placed on the front bench facing the presidential chair. It was on the occasion of the reception of M. Alexandre Duval, who

* *L'habit à la française* is a cross between a modern dress coat and a quaker's coat, worn in England as a court dress.—TR.

succeeded my father. M. Regnault de Saint-Jean d'Angély was to reply to M. Duval's speech. Many, many years have elapsed since then, yet the place, the circumstances, the particular moment, the ceremony, are all as vivid to my mind, as if they had happened yesterday. The moment I was seated, I became, on the part of those around us the object of sympathetic notice, easily accounted for by my black clothes and far from robust appearance. 'Poor little fellow,' I heard several people around me say in a low voice. One lady came up to my grandparents and after chatting with them for a moment, kissed me on my forehead with a look full of pity.

The ceremony began, and though it lasted two hours it did not seem long to me. And yet the two orators treated subjects far above my childish understanding ; their language, very florid, according to the taste prevalent at that period, was altogether outside the vocabulary of an urchin of six. But my father's name recurred very often. I heard them cite the titles of his works, which my relatives had religiously taught me (the applause of the public underlined, as it were, the praise bestowed upon him), some traits of his character, some of his noteworthy sayings. In his reply to M. Duval, M. Regnault de Saint-Jean d'Angély turned more than once in my direction, referred to me and drew the public's attention to me in affectionate and sympathetic terms. I felt somewhat uncomfortable, but at the same time deeply moved.

I hung my head and endeavoured to cover my face with my tiny cap. My heart beat very fast. 'Feeble offspring; tutelary protection of the Academy,' etc., were no doubt very vague terms to my understanding, but children are like the masses—they have no need to understand fully in order to be moved. Nay, it happens now and then that their emotion is in direct proportion to their inability to pierce the veil that hampers their perception. The mysterious is apt to heighten their impression; their imagination supplies what is wanted, and the effect of this ceremony took such hold on me that I remained for several days under the spell of my own emotion.

Sixteen years afterwards, on the 25th August 1829, at a public meeting of the Academy, I entered that same hall once more, and by the same door. I was met by a similar gentleman, dressed in a similar costume;* he conducted me to the same bench, I took the same seat; but this time I was no longer a simple spectator, I was one of the principal personages of the ceremony at which M. Lemer cier† read a poem on the invention of printing, which had obtained the prize and of which I was the author.

* It is only in 1848 that the secretary of 'l'Institut,' M. Pingard, relinquished his traditional costume. The following was the cause. On the day of the grand march past before the provisional government at the Barrière de l'Etoile, the Academy, formed part of the procession, —and was headed by M. Pingard in full official dress. Some lads raised the cry of 'Down with the Marquis.' When M. Pingard got home he put away his sword, his lace ruffles, his *habit à la française* and never donned them again.

† Népomucène Lemer cier, the favourite playwright of Bonaparte, and the author of a drama entitled 'Christophe Colomb.'—TR.

What had induced me to enter into such a competition ; how had I obtained that prize ? I should certainly not speak of this merely for the sake of talking about myself. But by going back to those earlier years I shall have the opportunity of recalling certain ideas, of depicting certain famous men of that period, Casimir Delavigne among others. In that way, I will endeavour to atone to the reader for the necessity of speaking now and then of my personal affairs.

II

The death of my father and mother threw me upon the care of my grandmother. People have not sufficiently noticed, perhaps, the peculiar character of the education imparted to children by their grandmothers. While the parents are alive, the grandmother seems mainly bent upon spoiling her grandchild. She is too apt to side with the latter against the parents. Victor Hugo has initiated us in the poetry of that rôle in 'L'Art d'être grand-père.' But when the death of the father and mother thrusts the child all of a sudden into the grandmother's hands and invests her, as it were, with the charge of the little one's soul, then that sweet bit of poetry takes flight and nothing remains but the prose, that is, the responsibility, the stern idea of duty. The grandmother has greater difficulties to accomplish that duty than the mother. The former cannot help feeling that she is, after all,

but a substitute, and the *great* difference in years between herself and the child renders the exercise of her authority more irksome to her. My grandmother who in addition to a considerable fund of shrewd, practical sense, had a very affectionate disposition, hit upon an ingenious idea in the task of bringing me up. She invoked the aid of a most powerful auxiliary—the recollection of my parents. Gone though they were, she brought me up with them. She made them interfere in the most trivial incidents of my education. ‘Now, do learn your lessons, it will please your mother. How grieved your father would be if he heard you tell an untruth.’ These and similar sentences exercised a strong influence over me. I feel convinced that my deeply-rooted faith in a future life sprang originally from this worship of the dead, from this spiritual presence of the bodily absent which my dear old grandmother had so strongly impressed upon me, and of which M. Fustel de Coulanges has given us such a soul-stirring picture in his beautiful work ‘*La Cité Antique*.’

One Sunday my grandmother took me with her to pay a visit to a clever doctor who, like ourselves, lived at Chaillot. His name was M. Dandecy. When we got into the hall we heard the sound of loud voices proceeding from the drawing-room, on entering which we beheld, standing with his back to the mantelpiece, an old gentleman, a smile lighting up the ‘brave’ face, his long, white hair brushed back

from his forehead. He seemed to hold his own successfully against those around him who looked like assailing him in earnest. The old man was Dr Gall. They were violently attacking his system, which he was defending with the jaunty, bantering air of the man who delights in a tussle. No sooner did we enter the room than M. Dandecy exclaimed : ' Parbleu, here is the very opportunity we want. We are going to put you to the test, doctor.' Then turning to me and pointing to me he added : ' You do not know this child, do you ? ' ' No, I have never seen him before.' ' Well, examine his head and give us his horoscope.'

Thereupon Dr Gall sits down, beckons me to come to him and starts fingering my skull. ' This child is yours, madame ? ' he asks, addressing my grandmother. ' Yes, monsieur, it is my grandson, he is an orphan and I am bringing him up.' ' Well, madame, what do you intend him to be ; what would you wish him to be ? ' ' A notary, monsieur.'

In those days a notary was a semi-sacred personage in the eyes of the bourgeoisie, and my grandmother was a downright bourgeoisie. The notary was looked upon both as a magistrate and a priest, he was the confidant of all one's sorrows, the arbiter or counsellor in all the family affairs ; he was a kind of lay confessor ; hence, my grandmother failed to conceive a more beautiful profession for her grandson. The doctor listened to her with a smile on his face, then

he began fingering my skull once more. 'Well, madame,' he said at last, 'you may as well make up your mind to it at once, that boy will never be a notary.' 'Then what will he be?' asked my grandmother. 'Before answering your question, allow me to ask you one. What was his father?' 'He is the son of M. Legouvé.' 'That's it, now I understand. Well, madame, the boy will be the son of his father. He'll write poetry. I am not going to say that it will be good poetry,' he added laughing, 'but he'll do that or nothing.'

To this prognostication of the doctor there was soon added, as far as I was personally concerned, the influence of my old tutor in the lower form, an erstwhile member of the Congregation of the Oratory,* who had but two passions in life—orthography and poetry. He had conceived a strong liking for me, because I happened to respond to these two passions. Thanks to him, I knew my grammar at ten, much better than I do at present, when I have the honour to be one of the forty legislators on all linguistic matters. In those days, I was capable of entering into contest with all the Girault-Duviviers on earth, on the rude battlefield bristling with orthographic pitfalls. With regard to poetry, my old tutor had predilections which have long gone out of fashion;

* The Congregation was founded in Italy by Saint Philip Neri (1575) and transferred to France by Cardinal de Bérulle (1611). Its chief aims are educational, but much care is bestowed upon the training of preachers.—TR.

Delille was his god. His great delight was to call me between school hours and to make me recite some of his smaller pieces, composed with so much art and at the same time with so much artifice ; ‘Le Coin du Feu,’ ‘Les Catacombes,’ ‘Le Café,’ ‘L’Ane,’ ‘Le Cheval.’ I knew two or three thousand lines of that description by heart. The model was probably not a very excellent one, for even in Delille’s own days, Marie-Joseph Chénier had twitted him with ‘putting rouge on Virgil’s face, and patches on Milton’s,’ but affected, bespangled and altogether antithetical as is the style, it nevertheless possesses qualities which had the advantage of initiating me in the art of poetical rhythm and developing in me the taste and feeling for metre. If it were necessary to justify myself in my own eyes for this admiration of yore, I should only have to remember that when he was only nineteen, consequently in 1821, Victor Hugo himself, in *Le Conservateur Littéraire*, praised ‘the *elegance* and the *harmony* of the Abbé Delille’s style,’ and congratulated him on ‘*his perfect knowledge of all the delicate resources of the French Muse.*’

My love of poetry grew apace, but had, heaven be praised, changed its object ; I had abandoned Delille for Corneille. My grandmother was my confidant. During my days of leave from school, I knew of no greater joy than to seat myself on a small stool at her feet and to recite to her the scathing speeches from ‘*Cinna*,’ ‘*Nicomède*’ the ‘*Horaces*,’

munching all the while potatoes baked in the ashes. True, this combination of potatoes and Alexandrine verses was rather calculated to spoil the purity of my diction, but in no way militated against my enthusiasm nor that of my grandmother; for I am inclined to believe that what the dear old lady admired most in 'Cinna' was myself.

When I had got as far as the 'remove,' I enlisted in the small poetical phalanx of our class, and composed three long pieces of poetry; an epistolary poem, a satire and a dithyrambic. The epistle, as a matter of course, treated of what I imagined to be my vocation, and equally, as a matter of course, I compared myself to Phaeton, eager to conduct the chariot of the Sun. The satire dealt with the war with Spain, and I severely maltreated the hero of the Trocadéro, the Duc d'Angoulême. The dithyrambic was sung to the glory of the four sergeants of La Rochelle, executed for complicity in a Bonapartist plot, and I ended up with the line;

'Et leur tête, en tombant, murmure : Liberté!'

When the three pieces were finished, the great question arose, 'to whom to show them, whom to consult?' The poet like the lover, not only needs a confidant, he wants a confessor, someone ready to give him absolution or rather to encourage him in his evil ways. Whom to choose? that was the question. I did not hesitate long. One Monday morning

when returning from my grandparents' to school, with my very slenderly lined purse containing twenty-five sous for the ensuing week's breakfasts, I espied at the corner of the Rue de Clichy, a commissionnaire, seated on his contrivance for carrying his parcels, his head covered with one of those grey coster's caps which have disappeared from civilisation, his body clad in brown velveteens, a commissionnaire whose face inspired me with confidence. Scarcely able to repress my emotion, I draw up to him and hand him a tiny parcel very carefully tied up together with a letter, I add to it the whole of my stock of money, my poor twenty-five sous. I had an idea that my generosity would bring me luck, and I impressed upon the man the necessity of taking the letter without delay, but not to wait for an answer. My letter was addressed as follows :

‘A MONSIEUR CASIMIR DELAVIGNE,
RUE HAUTEVILLE, NO. 17.’

In those days, Casimir Delavigne was little short of a god to the French youth. The triumph scored with ‘*Les Vêpres Siciliennes*,’ the startling success of ‘*Les Comédiens*,’ the popularity of ‘*Les Messéniennes*,’ had, to our thinking, invested him with the triple crown of tragic, comic and lyric poet. We knew that at the first performance of ‘*Les Vêpres Siciliennes*’ the enthusiasm of the pit had been such as to lead them to applaud during the whole of the interval between the fourth and fifth acts. The fact

had turned our heads, but we worshipped Casimir Delavigne in virtue of a still superior title. His muse had sung of Greece, of liberty, of France, he was the national poet. We greatly admired Lamartine, but Lamartine was a royalist, Lamartine had attacked Bonaparte. The famous line ;

‘ Rien d’humain ne battait sous son épaisse armure ’

seemed to us little short of blasphemy, for in those days we were all frantic liberals and frantic Bonapartists. People have professed themselves very indignant at that strange amalgam. The association of the name of Napoleon with that of liberty seemed a piece of arrant nonsense and the contention was absolutely just. Unfortunately every period, ours included, commits such pieces of arrant nonsense, in connection with their great men. Formerly we were apt to forget the despotism of Napoleon in favour of his genius, now-a-days we forget his genius and choose to remember only his despotism. The one mode of judging is as absolutely unfair as the other, and those two instances of different injustice are based on the selfsame fact. That fact is, that great men are not, as people are tempted to believe, marble or bronze figures, stuck motionless like statues in the framework of history. They are living, breathing beings, subject to changes, their faces are being constantly modified. Each period transforms them according to its political needs or the freaks of its imagination. At one moment

they represent one thing, the next something else. One might fitly compare them to those revolving beacons which show a blue or red or green light, according to the movements applied to them. In my youth, during the romantic movement, Richelieu was detested as the type of sanguinary despotism. He was the headsman cardinal, Victor Hugo called him the *crimson man*, and Providence, it was said, had decked him in that crimson robe in order to hide the stains of the blood he shed.

To-day Richelieu is the symbol of patriotism, an ancestor of the democracy, a precursor of '89. Why? Because in 1830 the imaginary and the poetical had their sway, and to-day we live under the rule of politics and history. Do we not witness the metamorphosis of all the heroes of the revolution? Danton is no longer the author of the massacres of September, he is the defender of the soil of the fatherland. There are certain democrats who speak of Robespierre with affection, like Madame Lebas who called him *le bon ami*. We cannot point out too often that the great men of the past are only the instruments in the hands of the present time. Their portraits are painted afresh every twenty or thirty years and their likeness is made to tally with the ideas, the symbol of which we seek in them. The name of Napoleon was to us a weapon against the Bourbons. The latter who had come back escorted by the foreigner and flying the white flag, represented to us

the ancient régime and national shame. Napoleon, the promulgator of the Civil Code and the conqueror of Europe, was the incarnation of equality and glory. Our worship of him was largely composed of our animadversion against the others. An unjust animadversion, if you will, an absurd hatred, for there was a thousand times more liberty under the Restoration than under the Empire, but we refused to pardon the Bourbons their alliance with the Holy Alliance ; and it always brings the blush to my face to think that at the time of that abominable assassination of the Duc de Berry by Louvel, the younger section of the French nation looked very indulgently on the assassin. That absurd classical education which exalted Brutus, Harmodius and Aristogiton into heroes, transformed, as far as we went, Louvel into a martyr. His replies at the trial were quoted everywhere. The Procurator-general having repeated several times the words, 'cowardly minded,' Louvel exclaimed at last : 'Cowardly, cowardly ; you are evidently not aware, monsieur, what an amount of courage it requires to kill a man who has never done you any harm.' To us these words seemed grand, like a sentence from the classics, and when, on being interrogated as to the motives which impelled him to the murder, Louvel replied : '*Since the 18th June 1815, I have never ceased to hear the booming of the cannon at Waterloo,*' Louvel seemed to us a figure out of Plutarch. I cannot repeat too often that that period will never be

properly understood without allowing largely for that recollection of Waterloo. That recollection was at the bottom of all our sentiments. We also constantly heard the cannon of that horrible battle and it explained our animosity against the Bourbons who had benefited by it, our sympathy with Napoleon who had gone down with us, our indulgence towards Louvel who had anathematised it, our enthusiastic admiration of Casimir Delavigne who had both glorified and bewailed it. There was not a single one of us who did not know the first 'Messénienne' and who did not repeat frequently the four lines on the Imperial Guard.

'On dit qu'en les voyant couchés sur la poussière,
D'un respect douloureux frappé par tant d'exploits,
L'ennemi, l'œil fixé sur leur face guerrière,
Les regarda sans peur pour la première fois !'

People may laugh as much as they like at our chauvinism, but those lines put a little balm on our wounds, and our hearts leaped for joy when on the 6th December 1823, Casimir Delavigne added to his many claims as a poet and a patriot, another, still more brilliant. On that day the bills of the Théâtre-Français bore the following announcement—

Première Représentation

L'ÉCOLE DES VIEILLARDS.

Every great artist has in his career what I would call the day of his advent. It is the day on which a

new work silences all competition even among his peers and causes him to pass at one bound the line that separates mere fame from glory. Such a work was 'Jocelyn' to Lamartine, 'Notre-Dame de Paris' to Victor Hugo, 'Eugénie Grandet' to Balzac, 'Les Huguenots' to Meyerbeer, 'Les Nuits' to Musset, 'L'École des Vieillards' to Casimir Delavigne. The mere fact of his name appearing on the bills of the Théâtre-Français was a triumph in itself, and looked like a revenge on his part. It reminded people that the author of 'Les Vêpres Siciliennes,' which had been refused by the reading committee a few years previously, had avenged that refusal by three startling successes at the Odéon, with that self-same 'Vêpres Siciliennes,' 'Les Comédiens,' and 'Le Paria,' and that when he confronted his former repentant and shame-faced judges once more, it was in the character of a conqueror. Nevertheless, that legend has to be considerably toned down. In reality 'Les Vêpres Siciliennes' had not been rejected, the comedians of the House of Molière had not misjudged its merits, but all this happened in 1818 when the allied troops still occupied French territory. They feared that the stage picture of a struggle between Frenchmen and aliens would entail a real danger even to the author, and the committee proposed to him to keep his turn open, but for another work. This adjournment which was not a refusal greatly benefited Casimir Delavigne. Picard, the then director of the Odéon was bolder

than his compeers in the Rue de Richelieu ; he took away from them both the work and the author, and his youthful patrons hailed both with the greater enthusiasm, seeing that to them, the patrons, the fact of applauding Casimir Delavigne meant hissing the committee of the Comédie-Française.

Be that as it may, 'L'École des Vieillards' was accepted with shouts of praise and the reading of it before the actors gave rise to an incident which still further marked its success. Casimir Delavigne had mentally reserved the principal part to Baptiste the Elder. But at the termination of the reading he heard someone come up quickly behind him and call out his name. On turning round he found himself face to face with Talma. 'Monsieur Delavigne,' said the latter, 'it is I who will play Danville for I am Danville.' For sometime before that, in fact, Talma had been acquainted with a woman much younger than himself, who was exceedingly handsome, and he was deeply enamoured and frantically jealous. There was a terrible commotion in the theatre. Damas who played the leading rôles in comedy tendered his resignation. It was, in fact, nothing less than the overthrow of all the hierarchical principles, a deliberate attack against the grand rule that had hitherto prevailed with regard to the distribution of parts. A leading tragedian enacting a comedy part, Orestes descending to the rank of a bourgeois, Joad appear-

ing in modern walking dress,* Mdlle. Mars and Talma acting in the same piece, all these contemplated innovations were so many causes for jealous irritation on the part of certain actors, and passionate expectation on the part of the public. On the first night the house looked as stormy as a sea in an equinoctial gale. The curtain rises, the door at the back of the stage is thrown open and the first person to enter is Talma, but Talma laughing and arm in arm with a comic actor, named Devigny. He wore a white wig, with a still whiter tuft drooping on the forehead, a blue coat with gilt buttons, black silk breeches and white silk stockings. The transformation was complete. The voice, the face, the gestures, the gait, everything about him betokened joy, genuine simplicity and good-nature. He was charming. The only thing he had preserved from his connection with tragedy was a rather strange habit which Ligier has imitated since ; instead of treading level with his right foot as he did with his left, he balanced himself upon its toe, and in so doing imparted to the body, then to the voice a slight, pathetic tremor. The charm did, nevertheless, not make itself felt at once. We never willingly grant a man the superiority in two different things. How long did Lamartine the poet have to struggle against Lamartine the orator? During the second act, though, the public began to thaw.

* The Ishoiada of the Bible and one of the principal characters in Racine's '*Athalie*.'—TR.

They no longer defended themselves against the spell, and after the first scene of the third act all resistance ceased. Curiously enough, that first scene of the third act of '*L'École des Vieillards*' is exactly the same scene as the first scene of the third act of '*Hernani*.' There are the selfsame old men, the one in love with a young girl of eighteen, his betrothed, the other with a young woman of twenty, his wife. Both ask pardon of those whom they love for loving them with the snow of so many winters on their heads.

Which of these two scenes is the more beautiful? I would almost make bold to say that there at any rate, Casimir Delavigne need not yield the palm to Victor Hugo. If the former did not hit upon a line of equal grandeur with that of—

'Ait oublié le corps en rajeunissant l'âme.'

the piece, as a whole, in its sustained elegance has as true a ring as the abruptly broken lines, aiming at the naturalistic, of Victor Hugo. I can even discern in them a tone of emotion and sincerity which affects the heart more directly than the somewhat lachrymose regrets of Don Gomez. Talma was absolutely inimitable in this invective of Danville's. Whosoever has seen him will never forget him. After a lapse of sixty years, I can still hear the words, '*Je souffre*.' The last lines fell from his lips in accents so full of charming tenderness and despondent resignation to his fate that one could not help idolising him. People

remarked to themselves that if that old man was not beloved, it was because old age in love matters was an incurable evil, and in that way, the conception of the poet was, thanks to the actor, fully and unmistakably brought home to the spectator.

Talma did more than that, he infused vitality into the piece when it seemed to be drooping, and practically saved it, perhaps, in the fourth act. That fourth act presented a real danger. In those days a young fellow entering the room of a young woman at midnight, and telling her in so many words that he loved her was considered a very bold situation. The author himself shook in his shoes and not without cause, for, in fact, at the entrance of the Duke, there had fallen upon the audience one of those threatening fits of silence which we all know but too well; fortunately for the author, his two interpreters were not afraid to face the struggle: they were Mdlle. Mars and Armand.

Mdlle. Mars had a very peculiar gift which, as far as I am aware, belonged to her only. Though her voice lacked power, she trained it in the end to produce effects in the modern drama, which no artist after her has been able to obliterate or perhaps to equal. How was it done? In this way.

She selected from the principal scene the word, the phrase, which was best calculated to sum up the character; after which she concentrated all her vocal power, all her intensity of expression on that word, just as with a lens we cause the rays of the sun to

converge on a single point. By doing this she lighted up the whole of the situation. It must not be thought, however, that, like some artists, she emasculated the whole of a rôle in order to bring a few passages into prominent relief; that school of acting did not as yet exist. Mdlle. Mars neglected nothing and put everything in its right place and in its proper light, but on this harmonious and clearly defined background, she concentrated a few flashes which positively dazzled the spectator. In that way the famous, 'Vous mentez, Monsieur le Duc,' of 'Mademoiselle de Belle-Isle,' the 'Parcequ'il a tué Raphaël Bazas,' of 'Clotilde,' the—

' Enfin on laisse dire à cette pauvre femme
Ce qu'elle a dans le cœur !'

of 'Hernani' came upon the spectator with such force as to present to him at once the living and complete image of the personage or of the situation represented. In the fourth act of 'L'École des Vieillards' she managed to hit upon one of those sublime cries and at the line of—

' Je vous dis que vous m'épouvantez !'

the whole of the house broke into rapturous applause, for the line exonerated the young woman at once; it was the atonement for her imprudence by the evidence of her honesty.

But it was not Mdlle. Mars who bore the heavier burden of that scene, it was Armand in the

character of the Duke. Armand had neither the fiery passion of Firmin, the charm of Bressant, nor the contagious ardour of Delaunay, but the elegance of his dress and manners, his shapely figure, his nice face, his way of addressing a woman rendered him eminently fit for those parts of the worldling who manages to obtain his pardon for everything he chooses to do. Armand succeeded in conveying this nocturnal and (therefore) perilous avowal of his passion with so much respect, taste and moderation that, when Hortense, frightened at the sound of her husband's return, hides the Duke in an adjoining closet, this exit, so difficult to any actor, was accompanied by lively applause ; and Casimir Delavigne who stood anxiously waiting at the wings flung himself upon Armand's neck, exclaiming : 'You have saved me.'

He was, to say the least, somewhat premature. The danger was by no means past ; it had only commenced. Scarcely is the Duke ensconced in his hiding place than Danville enters. His servant has told him that the Duke has called. Is he still there? Where is he? Impelled by his suspicions, Danville narrowly scans the troubled face, the tremulous voice, the evasive answers of Hortense, and all at once, enlightened by a glance of terror she casts in the direction of the cupboard, he says in a low voice : 'He is there.'

Let us suppose for a moment that a dramatist of

our days had found such a situation. What would he do? As a matter of course, Danville would shout at the top of his voice, '*He is there!*' would make straight for the Duke, hustle his wife off the stage, and this would be the starting point for the scene between the two men. But in Casimir Delavigne's time, playwrights were afraid of such daring experiments because they might evoke hisses and cat-calls. Face to face with a perilous situation they were much more anxious to 'save' it than to grapple boldly with it. Theirs was the system of out-flanking a position. Consequently, Danville remains perfectly self-contained, asks Hortense to retire and on her hesitating to do so, he himself retires. Left to herself the young wife advances a step or two towards the closet where the Duke is hidden, then checks herself and disappears at the back, saying :

: '*Il pourra s'échapper.*'

This time the audience were very nigh losing their temper, and they were not far wrong. Assuredly, the young woman showed a lack of discretion in trusting to mere chance for such an escape; for a moment the fate of the piece hung in the balance; but no sooner had Mdlle. Mars disappeared than Talma re-entered the room like a whirlwind, calling out to the Duke with such rage that he carried everything before him, and virtually cast a spell over the audience during the whole of that admirable scene

which Corneille would not have been ashamed to own. Every line of it is *tragic*—there is not a word that smacks of the *tragedian*. The passionate dialogue sounds like the echo of the verse of ‘Le Cid,’ but with a familiar ring about it, reminding one of our everyday life. It is heroic poetry in a frock coat.

Talma’s rendering of it produced an immense effect, and when at the end of the scene in reply to the Duke’s

‘Je vous attends !’

he replied ;

‘Vous n’aurez pas l’ennui de m’attendre longtemps,’

the terrible matter-of-fact tone and gesture caused a shudder to run through the house, and the curtain fell amidst a hurricane of applause. In the fifth act the delightful comedy scene between Danville and Bonnard transformed what was up till then, a great success into a veritable triumph, which both Lamar-tine and Alexandre Dumas enthusiastically confirmed, the one in verse, the other in prose. The latter, in his ‘Memoirs’ adds that the part of Hortense is not equal to that of Danville. He is right, and Mdlle. Mars shared that opinion. In 1838, when my work brought me in contact with Mdlle. Mars, I was talking to her, one day, about that rôle of Hortense, and her reply showed me how constant was her pre-occupation with regard

to the consistent delineation of her characters. 'I have met with few parts that presented greater difficulties,' she said; 'and would you know why? It's because Hortense is not of the same age throughout the piece. In the first act she is five-and-twenty; in the fifth she is only eighteen. In the exposition Hortense is a "grande coquette," and at the dénouement she is an "ingenue."*' You cannot conceive the difficulty of imparting an air of truth to a rôle when the various parts of it do not hold together. Fortunately,' she added, in a sprightly tone, 'the public did not notice it, and not a single critic commented upon it.' 'Whose fault was that?' I answered, 'yours, undoubtedly.' 'And the rôle's also,' she retorted vivaciously, 'for, after all, and in spite of my reservations, it is a very beautiful part. The contradictions disappear before the brilliancy, the sincerity, the amiability pervading the whole, and the reading of the charming letter which virtually constitutes the dénouement is in itself a windfall to any actress.' 'And,' said I, 'do you happen to know the story of that letter?' 'No.' 'It is peculiar, to say the least. Casimir Delavigne himself felt very puzzled how to let that letter fall into the hands of Danville, that letter which clears Hortense's character. He confides his trouble to Scribe, to whom, in fact, he confided

* The words as employed here must be taken in their theatrical meaning. The 'grande coquette' and the 'ingenue' are specially defined characters on the French stage, ever since the time of Molière. Célimène in 'Le Misanthrope' is the type of the former, Agnès in 'L'Ecole des Femmes' the type of the latter.—TR.

everything. "I fancy I can get you out of your difficulty," said Scribe. "I am writing a piece in one act, entitled; 'Michel et Christine,' in which there occurs a situation similar to yours, and I think I have found a rather ingenious solution. You may have it and welcome. No one will suspect the loan, because no one would imagine that a grand five-act comedy would condescend to borrow from a poor little vaudeville? And I'll enjoy my find doubly, seeing that it will be useful to you as it is to me."

Scribe had guessed correctly, no critic reproached Delavigne with his slight imitation, and his triumph assumed the proportions of an event with the collegians and students.

It was in the first flush of my enthusiasm that I had sent my small parcel to Casimir Delavigne. The reader may easily imagine the anxiety with which I awaited the answer. I had not long to wait. Six days afterwards I received a letter, which I feel very happy at being able to transcribe textually.

'MONSIEUR,—You bear a name which is very dear to the muses. It is a perilous honour of which you promise to render yourself worthy. I have read your verses and I wish to read them over with you. Appoint your own hour and day. I am entirely at your service. I feel both honoured and pleased to afford the son the hints which it would still be so useful to

me to receive from the father.—Pray believe me, with sincere esteem, yours—CASIMIR DELAVIGNE.

‘23rd December, 1823.’

This letter is virtually as good as a portrait of Casimir Delavigne. A letter, written in such a strain to a lad of seventeen on the very morrow of the writer's triumphant success is as rare as the triumphant success itself. Could anything be more simple, modest and kind? Could anything be more graceful than this reminiscence of my father, so delicately alluded to? I made my appearance at his domicile, scarcely less touched by his reply than trembling at his verdict. He received me in his very simply furnished drawing-room, in the Rue d'Hauteville. He was dressed in a short black frock-coat, black trousers, white stockings and list slippers, the window was open, the winter sun was flooding the apartment. He rose to meet me, took my hand and pointing to those large luminous tracks, he said, ‘This is indeed beautiful weather in which to discuss poetry, we'll be able to have a long chat.’ I stammered a few inarticulate words, my heart beat so fast as to prevent my speaking. I felt scarcely less surprised than troubled; surprised at seeing such a little man; it seemed to me that a great poet should be big; still further surprised at finding him so youthful in face and general appearance. He had no beard; and when he smiled it might have been the smile of a child; the lower part of the face

was rather thin, but the upper part was magnificent ; a broad and ample forehead and bright sparkling eyes. He noticed my embarrassment and said, 'Let me tell you at once that I have read your verses and that I have found much in them which is good, but before discussing them with you, I would ask you a very prosaic question : Have you got sufficient to live upon ?' 'My guardian has told me that I shall have, if not an enormous fortune, at any rate a comfortable income.' 'In that case, let us look once more at your manuscript.' Seeing that I looked surprised, he added, laughing, 'My question has somewhat puzzled you, so I'll explain. I have noticed in your verses a facility for versification, some happy gifts, nay, some very original expressions, but between that and the talent to build up a career there is a vast difference. And, unless I can see the signs of an evident vocation, of a superiority which admits of no doubt, I shall always endeavour to dissuade a young man from seeking a livelihood by poetry. One may live to write verses, one should not write verses to live. My mind being at rest on that score with regard to you, and having no further qualms of conscience we may proceed to read your three pieces.

The reading took half-an-hour, and during that half-hour of conversation, I learnt more than I could have done from all the treatises on rhetoric. It was living, breathing criticism. He made me put my own finger, as it were, on every fault, showed

me all my shortcomings, pointing out at the same time everything that might be construed into a happy augury of the future. When the reading was at an end he said, 'My dear child, you will find me at home every Sunday morning. Come and see me as often as you like. Bring me what you have done or bring me nothing at all, just as you please. In the one case we'll read your verses, and now and then some of mine. It will enable you to take your revenge for my criticisms by criticising me in return,' he added, laughing. 'Well, that's agreed upon. Au revoir.'

I went away, deeply moved, enlightened with regard to my own merits, my heart as much affected as my brain. Casimir Delavigne's autograph made the round of the lycée, the account of my visit became the subject of all our conversations, my schoolfellows were to the full as deeply touched as I by so much sincerity added to so much affectionate solicitude.

A few weeks afterwards I took him a grand ode entitled 'Le Gèneie,' and headed 'To Casimir Delavigne.'

Scarcely had he opened the paper when he exclaimed, 'Oh, oh, this is a very grave mistake and at the very beginning.' 'Where is the mistake?' 'In the dedication. My dear boy, I have no doubt that you are perfectly sincere, that you wrote my name and the word genius side by side in good faith, but,' he added cheerfully, 'this only proves that as yet you

know nothing about it. Just consider for a moment. "Genius." That's the word one applies to Corneille, to Racine, to Sophocles, to Shakespeare. You acted unwisely in writing that line, for it will make my criticism very severe with regard to your ode. Read it to me.' While I was reading he neither gave a sign of approval or disapproval, and when I had finished he sat quite still for a moment. At last he said, 'This is very serious, your ode won't do at all, not at all. If the execution were merely faulty, I should take no heed of it. A defective style is the concomitant of youth. But what affects me is the feebleness of the ideas. After your first verses I expected something better. Will you take my advice? You are passing through a crisis, and you must take a heroic resolution. Remain for a whole twelvemonth without writing a line of poetry. Put aside all idea of form. You'll always be able to pick that up. Work at the foundation. Forge your mind into shape. Study without cessation, read the masterpieces of other countries. You know Corneille, Racine and Molière almost by heart. That is a good deal, but it is not enough. Add Sophocles and Shakespeare to them, and try to get at them in their own text if you can. Nor should you neglect our great prose writers. Prose is the nurse of poetry. In short, try to get at yourself by studying others. And in about a twelvemonth, we'll see.'

Many, many years have elapsed since that conver-

sation, and the older I grew, the more was I struck by its depth and justice. The words, 'Try to get at yourself by studying others' sound like a paradox, in reality they contain a whole treatise on the art of poetry. In days of old, people were apt to say, and perhaps rightly, 'In order to remain true to one's self, one must remain within one's self.' But in our days one cannot lock one's self up within one's self. In our days when all our surroundings virtually struggle for the mastery over ourselves, when the ideas around us enter the heart and the mind at every pore, when lectures, newspapers, reviews, books, exhibitions, conversation, travels produce within us a strong, never-ceasing current of the most contradictory opinions, in our days, *naïveté*—ignorance of what others have done and do, if you will—can no longer be called individuality. In order to estimate one's own strength it becomes necessary to compare one's self with others. The only way to imitate no one is to study everyone. The assiduous intercourse with the various master-minds substitutes mature enthusiasm for a blind craze, and teaches you, either by the principle of attraction or repulsion, for what you are fit and what you are likely to become. 'Tell me what you like and I'll tell you who you are.' Genius may perhaps dispense with such rules, mere talent cannot dispense with it.

Those words of wisdom (on Casimir Delavigne's part) have another merit, their stern frankness. How far removed are we already from those illustrious

poets who shower the brevet rank of poet on no matter whom in the sixth form who happens to flatter them, and who sow expressions of admiration broadcast in order to reap a harvest of admirers. The rôle of consulting poet is a very difficult one to enact. Sincerity is exposed to great dangers there. Lamartine got over the difficulty by sheer hyperbole. He paid you such compliments that it was impossible to believe them. Béranger was sincere; nevertheless, I remember one occasion when he wittily chaffed in my presence a bore who was constantly worrying him with his poetical effusions. No sooner had Béranger taken up the manuscript than he began: 'This is delightful,' he said. 'But M. Béranger you have not read it.' 'No, I have not read this one, but I have read the others. Besides, I know you by this time and feel perfectly sure that it is fully equal to the others.' 'Never mind, I should like you to do me the honour of reading this, and I'll call again in about a week to have your opinion.' 'It would be altogether useless, for I could only repeat in a week what I am telling you now—namely, that it is perfectly delightful. So you had better take it away and not bring me any more. When, like you, a man has an individual gift, when he writes verse which is unlike that of anyone else, he should never consult a second party, lest he might spoil his originality by alterations.' 'Ah, cher maître, you overwhelm me.' And the would-be poet took his departure, beaming with pleasure.

Casimir Delavigne's advice was not wasted on me ; I employed my twelvemonth of poetical fasting in translating 'The Agamemnon of Æschylus and Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet' ; I read, pencil in hand, our prose masterpieces, and at the end of that period I came to him fortified by study and a fund of serious observation which pleased him. I had moreover the plan of a tragedy which did not displease him, and an idea of which he fully approved. This idea was to compete for the prize of poetry of the Academy. 'The subject,' I remarked, 'is somewhat severe, but not commonplace ;—it is the Invention of Printing ; but what lies nearest to my heart is that this prize, in the event of my obtaining it, would establish an additional tie between my father and myself.' 'Then compete,' he said emphatically, 'you are right. I, too, began by an academical contest.' 'And did you not get the prize?' I asked laughing. 'No, I did not, and the verdict against me was just. The subject was, "Les Avantages de l'Étude," and I took it into my head to write a paradox "à la Jean-Jacques." I fell foul of the advantages of study in a scoffing epistle. . . . ' 'Full of delightful lines, which have become proverbial,' I remarked. 'Do you know them?' 'I could quote them to you, this one for instance :

“ Les sots depuis Adam sont en majorité.”

‘And I have never been able to make out why you did

not get the prize.' 'In fact, it led to a good deal of discussion among my judges. Mercier was decidedly on my side. But they reproached me with having failed somewhat in my respect to the learned body by not treating the subject seriously, and the preference was given to Pierre Lebrun, whose poem, after all, was better than mine. Don't do as I did, do not attack the invention of printing; and go and call upon Lemer cier; there are three valid reasons for your doing so; first of all, he was your father's friend, you may reckon upon a kind welcome; he is a man of first-rate intellect and sure to give you good advice; furthermore, he has "the ear" of the Academy, and will be a staunch champion of your interests.' 'Side by side with you, I trust.' 'You must not depend on me,' he replied laughing; 'I am a very indifferent member, and scarcely worth my eighty-three francs per month. I scarcely ever go there. I am wrong, I know, for the few times I do go, I am vastly amused. But my work and rehearsals and above all, the bad habit of not going, prevent my going. It is wholly a question of habit. My feet have not got used to turn in the direction of the Pont des Arts on Thursdays. I don't go there because . . . I don't go there. When you belong to it . . . for you must belong to it, if for no other reason than because you owe that much to your father, you must be exact in your attendance. We'll perhaps meet there then,' he added, laughing, 'for I shall be old and I'll go. The Aca-

demy has one great advantage. Thanks to it when one has ceased to be somebody, one is still something. Go and see Lemer cier.'

Such was the beginning of my friendship with Casimir Delavigne, and in those days no name shone with greater brilliancy than his. At present the school of 'Le Dédain Transcendant,' to use the name it chooses to bestow upon itself, treats him as it treats Béranger, Chateaubriand, Scribe, Lamennais, Lamartine, it consigns him with the others to oblivion. I am making a mistake, it does not forget. It resuscitates now and then those whom it has buried to tack to their names this or that contemptuous epithet. Does it, after all, matter much? Casimir Delavigne remains, nevertheless, one of the most brilliant intellects of the Restoration and the monarchy of July. How various and delightful were his gifts. The choruses of 'Le Paria' scarcely lose anything by being read side by side with those of 'Esther' and 'Athalie'; 'Don Juan d'Autriche' has been and is still one of the most diverting comedies of our time; 'L'École des Vieillards' contains two excellent male parts, besides the beautiful scenes I have already pointed out. 'Louis XI' counts among the dramas which still move the masses, and the startling success it obtained lately at the Odéon is a virtual protest against the systematic shelving of Casimir Delavigne's repertory by the Comédie-

Française. No anthology of the nineteenth century would be considered complete unless it granted a conspicuous place to 'L'Ame du Purgatoire,' 'Les Limbes,' 'Les Adieux à la Madeleine.' A. de Musset was never weary of quoting those lines from one of the 'Messénniennes,'

'Eurotas ! Eurotas ! Que font tes lauriers-roses
Sur ton rivage en deuil par la mort habité ?
Est-ce pour insulter à ta captivité
Que ces nobles fleurs sont écloses ?'

As for myself, I am free to admit that I cannot speak lukewarmly of Casimir Delavigne, his name is too closely bound up with my dearest recollections, his heart and his talent, the man and the poet constituted too precious a whole for such indifference. His was truly an exquisite disposition. Simplicity well befits a famous man. Casimir Delavigne was simplicity personified, nay more ; he was ingenuous, *ingenuus*, in the sense of the beautiful Latin word. His was the candid grace of youth, his looks, his smile, his features positively shed light around him. His existence savoured of the patriarchal. His father, his mother, his sister, his sister's children, one of his brothers, all lived under the same roof with him, I might say under his roof, for the proceeds of his work made up a considerable item in the resources of the community. But, seeing that he had been very delicate during his infancy ; that his health was never very good and that his

feeble constitution demanded great care at all times, he had as it were remained the 'little one' of the family of which he was the mainstay. Let the reader imagine a kind of Benjamin and Joseph—Joseph in Egypt, of course—in one. He was absolutely ignorant of the practical side of life. I have a vivid recollection of seeing him one day on the Place de la Bourse, utterly helpless amidst the carriages coming and going in all directions; his two brothers endeavouring to pilot him, but having all their work to do to prevent him from being run over; yet, notwithstanding all this, the soul knew no fear, was generous and enthusiastic to a degree and kindled with emotion at heroism of any kind.

If Casimir Delavigne had lived in the present day, a single one of his former successes would have sufficed to make him rich; as it was, twenty years of a triumphant career barely provided him with the most modest comforts and the wherewithal to buy, towards the end of his life, a tiny country place in his beloved Normandy, La Madeleine, where he hoped to end his days, and which, after all, he was compelled to sell in a few years. To console himself for his loss, he often seated himself on the opposite bank of the river whence he could get a glimpse of La Madeleine, and it was there that he composed one of the most delightful elegies in the French language.*

* 'Adieu, Madeleine chérie,
Qui te réfléchis dans les eaux

Comme une fleur de la prairie
Se mire au cristal des ruisseaux.
Ta colline, où j'ai vu paraître
Un beau jour qui s'est éclipsé,
J'ai rêvé que j'en étais maître.
Adieu, ce doux rêve est passé.

' Assis sur la rive opposée,
Je te vois, lorsque le soleil
Sur les gazons boit la rosée,
Sourire, encore à ton reveil.
Doux trésors de ma moisson mûre,
De vos épis un autre est roi !
Tilleuls dont j'aimais le murmure
Vous n'aurez plus d'ombre pour moi

' Cette fenêtre était la tienne
Hirondelle, qui vins loger
Bien des printemps dans ma persienne
Où je n'osais te déranger !
Dès que la feuille était fanée.
Tu partais la première, et moi
Avant toi je pars cette année ;
Mais reviendrai-je comme toi ?

' Adieu, chers témoins de ma peine
Forêt, jardin, flots que j'aimais
Adieu, ma fraîche Madeleine !
Madeleine, adieu pour jamais
Je pars, il le faut, je te cède ;
Mais le cœur me saigne en partant
Qu'un plus riche, qui te possède,
Soit heureux où nous l'étions tant !'

CHAPTER II

M. Legouvé's Prize-Poem.—The Academy in 1829.—Népomucène Lemer cier.—M. Legouvé gains the Prize.—A Rehearsal.—A Successful Performance.—A full-length Portrait of Lemer cier.—A Reading at the Comédie-Française.—A Poet of Sixteen.—Lemer cier's first Piece.—Lemer cier and David the Painter.—A Curious Love Story.—An Anecdote of Paul Delaroche.—Lemer cier at the Premières of his Plays.—Talma on 'Inspiration.'—Lemer cier and Bonaparte.—An Evening at Malmaison.—Lemer cier during the Empire.

I

1829 and 1830 are not only two years which follow upon one another, two sisters, the elder of which has the start of a twelvemonth of the younger ; they are also a mother and daughter. The one has begotten the other, the one has prepared the other's coming. In 1829 we are in the thick of the struggle, in 1830 we are in the flush of victory ; a twofold victory, for there has been a double revolution, a political revolution and a literary revolution. On the one hand the liberals against the royalists, on the other, the romanticists against the classicists. Such a movement necessarily produced its counter-effect at the Academy which, in fact, became divided into two parties, one might say, into two camps. The most curious

feature in connection with this was that nearly all the academicians turned out to be revolutionaries and reactionaries at the same time; the liberals being classicists, and the romanticists royalists. There were, for instance, on the one side, Andrieux, Arnault, Lemer cier, Jouy, Étienne; on the other, Chateaubriand and Lamartine; between these, and holding, as it were, the balance, such men as Casimir Delavigne and Villemain.

The Academy, as I have said already, had chosen for the subject of the prize-poem, 'The Invention of Printing.' I sent in my piece of poetry, and on Casimir Delavigne's advice wrote to M. Lemer cier asking him for a few moments' conversation. One fine morning about ten I find myself at No. 8 Rue Garancière, and hand my card to the servant who almost immediately afterwards shows me into a very plainly furnished, nay, severe looking, study. The moment I enter I behold rising from his chair and coming towards me, a man of about sixty. He is below the middle height and slightly lame, but the face itself with its silver grey hair carefully combed forward on the temples is still very charming. The forehead, divided into two as it were by the Napoleonic lock, was covered by a little network of tiny, quivering veins like the neck of a thoroughbred; his large, blue, limpid eyes flashed like carbuncles, the aquiline nose positively drooped on a remarkably small mouth with thin restless lips, the latter as ready

to launch the bitter trait as to relax into the semi-cynical, semi-benevolent smile. Added to all this, a grace and courtesy which reminded one of the manners of that vanished French society in which he had lived much. Of course, I did not notice all this, I rather felt it; a first glance often partakes of a kind of divination. We had advanced towards one another and but a few steps separated us, when he suddenly stopped and looked at me. '*Heavens, how like your father,*' he said, in a tone of surprise and emotion. The tone and the look went straight to my heart. I understood at once that he had been really fond of my father, that he already liked me for his sake, and when he added, pointing to a seat; 'I am glad to see you, very glad; tell me, what lucky thought brought you to me;' I had some difficulty in stating coherently my conversation with Casimir Delavigne and my intention of competing for the prize-poem. While listening to me, he kept smiling, and said at last: 'It is pretty evident that Casimir Delavigne does not go often to the Academy. He is utterly at sea with regard to our duties. My dear boy, the rules are absolutely against my knowing that you are competing, seeing that I am one of your judges.'

Noticing that I began to look glum, he went on, 'Luckily, there is a way of managing the regulations as there is a way of managing heaven. For instance, on election days, we take our oath that we have not pledged ourselves with regard to any candidate: in

reality we are all more or less pledged. It is just the same with regard to the competitors for the prize-poem ; we are supposed to be altogether ignorant of their names, and very often we know every one of them. After all, there is not much harm in this, for let me tell you that, at the Academy, as elsewhere, one does not take up the cudgels for works unless they are capable of defending themselves, hence I do not scruple to ask you the number of your piece of poetry.'

'It is Number 14,' I said.

'Very well, we'll keep our eye on Number 14. If it appears to me deserving of the prize, I'll defend it warmly ; if I happen to come upon one which is superior to it, I'll abandon you without the least compunction.'

'That's all I want,' I replied somewhat sharply. He smiled at my show of mettle and added,

'I have got an idea that I shall not abandon you. You must have inherited something more than the mere eyes of your father. But, first of all, tell me, have you put your heart into your work. How did the subject strike you?'

'Beautiful from the very first, more beautiful as I went deeper into it.'

'You are right, it is a grand subject. Do you know what the world was like before the invention of printing. Like a planet where the light only shone for a few of the elect. That beautiful sentence, "The

sun shines for everybody," is only true with regard to genius since the invention of printing.'

'I am sorry,' I replied laughing, 'you did not tell me this before the competition, I should have put it into my piece of poetry.'

'Very likely,' he remarked, laughing also, 'but *before* the competition, I should not have told you. Come and see me again one of these days ; your piece will have been read by then, and I will tell you its fate.'

A fortnight afterwards, on a Thursday, about twelve, I got to the Rue Garancière just as Lemercier was dressing.

'Just in time!' he exclaimed. 'You have been selected to compete. There are really some very good things in that Number 14. What struck me most was a passage which savours somewhat of the talent of your father ; there is a certain melancholy strain unlike the habitual tone of the works sent to us. But I ought not to hide from you that you have three formidable rivals ; first of all, the great competitor in ordinary, Bignan, who is strongly supported by Baour-Lormian ; then there is a charming poetess of whom I think very highly, Mdlle. Tastu, and last M. X. B. Saintine. They are quoting a couple of lines from his piece which are beautiful. Speaking of the art of printing, he says :—

'Voilà donc le levier
Qu' Archimède implorait pour soulever le monde ! . . .'

‘Well, we’ll see, we’ll see. They are going to read the four pieces to-day in order to compare them with one another ; at five o’clock we’ll know how the land lies. Come back at five.’ Meanwhile he finished dressing. Very careful, nay even coquettish, in his dress, he was holding a tiny cravat, brand-new and very pretty, with which he seemed extremely pleased.

‘Don’t worry yourself,’ he said, putting it on, ‘this cravat will get the prize.’

I need scarcely say that I was punctual to the minute. The moment he caught sight of me he exclaimed ; ‘Awarded unanimously, awarded unanimously. Baour-Lormian * wanted to break a lance for his beloved Bignan, but Jouy,† with his usual impetuosity and his comical outbursts of temper, got up and told him to his face that no man with the least sense of “what’s what” would refuse the prize to Number 14. As a matter of course, everyone, Baour-Lormian included, burst out laughing ; the vote was taken and when the result was known the life-secretary took your manuscript and began slowly to unfasten the small envelope containing your name. Every one of us knew the name ; nevertheless, there was a moment of anxious expectation and silence. We did not take our eyes off the secretary, and when he read out the name of Ernest Legouvé, there was

* Baour-Lormian is chiefly remembered among students by his metrical translation of Tasso’s ‘Jerusalem Delivered.’

† Jouy (Etienne) is more widely known, he was virtually the first of the *chroniqueurs modernes* with his, ‘Ermite de la Chaussée d’Antin.’
—TR.

a general sigh of satisfaction and emotion. These small matters ought to make you happy, for it was really to your father that all this sympathy was addressed. This will tend to show you the recollection he has left among us. Thanks to him, you enter life by a very beautiful gate indeed. You are both a reminiscence and a hope.'

At these words I flung myself on his neck. 'That's all right,' he said, embracing me in his turn; 'but the first thing we must think of now is the public ceremony. It is your première. A first performance. Nothing short of a success will do.' He stopped for a moment, like someone lost in thought, then all at once: 'We had better have a rehearsal first. Here is your manuscript. I brought it home with me, because I have been deputed to read it at the meeting. Well, we had better go through it together. I know the public and am not altogether inexperienced as a reader. In about five minutes, we'll know what we may expect from it.'

Thereupon he took my manuscript, his index finger following every line as he glanced through it. Every now and then he stopped to tell me, 'That's where the applause will come in . . . and there also. . . . Here the house ought to come down. . . . Oh, oh, these twenty lines won't get a hand . . . nor will this passage. . . . Here is a bit for which I'll answer beforehand. And if we can manage to evoke between whiles a few murmurs of general satisfaction and an

equal number of approving oh's or ha's, we'll produce an excellent impression with half a score of startling effects. You may look forward to the grand day without fear.'

His prophecy was realised to the letter. At every mark of approval predicted by him he raised his eyes towards me with a smile, as if to say, 'Did I not tell you so.'

At the termination of the meeting, I went out and found in the courtyard of the institute that crowd of known and unknown friends which awaits the successful man with outstretched hands and kindly looks, the crowd that is ready to throw its arms around your neck. Well, the reader may believe me or not, amidst all this homage so gratifying to a young fellow of twenty-two, my 'mind's eye' beheld nothing but the smile and look of M. Lemer cier. It was because I had a very peculiar feeling towards M. Lemer cier, a feeling which one experiences only once, and only in one's youth, a feeling which is made up of admiration, respect and gratitude, but which is distinct from all three and surpasses them; I cherished towards him a feeling partaking of the nature of a religion. No doubt I had admired and liked Casimir Delavigne much, but he and I were too near one another in years; his character, charming as it was, had not sufficient strength in it for my admiration, however lively, to become aught more than a literary admiration, and my affection, however real, to go beyond

sympathy and gratitude. The act of worshipping demands more, there is no worship without a slight amount of trembling before the Lord. I have always, if not altogether trembled, at any rate slightly shaken in M. Lemer cier's presence, yet, he always received me most cordially. I even became a frequent visitor at his house, and both his wife and daughter treated me with similar kindness. In spite of all this his superiority was never absent from my mind. Was it blind enthusiasm for his works? By no means. I perceived their defects, regretfully, it is true, and angry with myself for seeing them, but I did see them. Was I dazzled by his fame? Not at all. He had neither the brilliant halo accorded to the admittedly illustrious nor the noisy popularity of a contested genius. To what then was my sentiment due? Was it to himself or to what one instinctively guessed to be within the man, or to what emanated from him, in short, to what? I am unable to say, but one felt that notwithstanding the real merit of his works, the man was infinitely superior to the poet. His looks, his conversation, his appearance diffused a kind of natural authority which is like the atmosphere in which great characters and lofty souls move. He taught me the rapturous sensation of loving, with uplifted looks, of loving above one's self. Hence, the reader may imagine my joy, when, many years after his death, I had the opportunity of taking up his defence. A man of intellect and talent thought fit to write in an article

in the *Journal des Débats* the contemptuous and depreciating words: 'That worthy Monsieur Lemer cier.' Such a term applied to such a man affected me like a blasphemous utterance, and I addressed an almost indignant and deeply-felt reply to the editor. A fortnight afterwards I received a letter in a very shaky handwriting on that old-fashioned, large-sized paper of former days. There was no envelope, it was simply fastened with the impression of a seal on black sealing-wax and ran as follows:

'I thank you in my mother's name and in mine. You belong to those who cultivate the sentiment of remembering. Your reply to that article in the paper has touched both of us very deeply.

'N. LEMERCIER.'

The signature was that of Mdlle. Lemer cier. I went at once to these two ladies of whom I had lost sight long ago. What a change was there. The daughter, when I lost sight of them, was about eighteen, with grand musical aptitudes and rare capacities. In spite of her forty summers, the mother was charming in virtue of her elegance, her goodness and intelligence, she was a gentlewoman to the finger-tips. Their mode of life seemed exceedingly comfortable, and the prestige of M. Lemer cier having been reflected on them my recollection of them was virtually surrounded by a poetical halo. On

reaching No. 12 Rue de Grenelle, I am directed to a narrow, rather dark staircase and shown into a small, scantily-furnished drawing-room, where, seated by the fireplace, her arm in a sling, I behold an old lady with grey hair, a white and emaciated face, who receives me with a kindly smile, who conveys to me by a sign that she cannot rise to welcome me. It is Madame Lemer cier ; one arm and both her legs were paralysed. Deeply affected by this painful and altogether unexpected sight, I was scarcely able to stammer a few words, when an inner door opened and I beheld coming towards me another woman, very much younger, and yet, looking almost as old. She was walking on two crutches and dressed—like the other—more than plainly. It was Mdlle. Lemer cier. Like her mother, she was also paralysed. I shall not attempt to describe my feelings. It was the whole of my youth which uprose before me in the shape of these two spectres. This was the change thirty years had wrought in the companions of my early manhood. I was almost ashamed to find myself so strong, to appear before them full of health and vigour. Gradually, however, the sadness wore off. The past, uprising once more between us dispersed the sombre present. We fell a-chatting, as in the days of old, cheerfully and affectionately reviving our most cherished recollections, and when I left I promised them to discharge my debt of gratitude to M. Lemer cier in a different way than

by a few lines in a paper. I discharged the debt contracted towards myself as much as to them. On the 25th October 1879, at a public meeting of the Institute, I took my seat in official dress, as the representative of the Académie Française in the small circular rostrum, specially reserved to lecturers, and there, in the self same place where M. Lemer cier in 1829 had done his utmost for my prize-poem, I read a carefully-thought-out essay on him, in which I endeavoured to resuscitate the too quickly forgotten author of 'Agamemnon' and 'Pinto' by drawing attention to his powerful originality. Unfortunately not one of those dear friends of yore was there to listen to me; both the mother and daughter had departed like the father; my words were addressed to their memory only, my tiny wreath of *immortelles* only found its place on a tomb.

Népomucène Lemer cier was one of the most brilliant literary figures of the Empire; the word genius was tacked to his name. General Bonaparte, when First Consul, honoured him with the name of friend; M. Talleyrand, when they called him the most brilliant talker of Paris, replied 'It is not I who deserve that name but Lemer cier.' And to crown it all, Ducis wrote about him as follows :

'I am starting for Paris to-morrow morning with my young and charming friend, Lemer cier. I am strongly attached to him and admire him as an extra-

ordinary being. He had scarcely emerged from the state of infancy when, in order to cure his young body, half of which had been struck with paralysis, he submitted to the most cruel tortures ; these seem to have been the stepping stones by which he ascended to the lofty sphere in which he now dwells. He holds the reins of that body and drives prudently and firmly both the living and the lifeless parts of it. In the former resides his soul, endowed with a double quantity of spiritual refinement, a perception of things so wide, a boldness of conception so daring as to make him, to me, a delightful phenomenon, while the lifeless part makes him a martyr who calls forth all my tenderness, a suffering hero who astonishes me. All this explains to me the grand passions he has inspired, for woman's eyes are quick to understand and adore such prodigies.'

This is, undoubtedly, a striking portrait and one cannot help asking one's self how much there remains to-day of him who inspired it. A name assuredly, but scarcely anything but a name. The principal work of M. Lemer cier the '*Panhypocrisiade*' is redeemed from oblivion only by the strangeness of its title. '*Agamemnon*' lies buried in the common trench amidst the hundreds of tragedies not bearing the name of Corneille or Racine. '*Pinto*' is quoted with praise now and again, but as an instance of 'something boldly attempted' rather than as 'a task well done.' Nor has M. Lemer cier had the good

fortune to survive in a few lines, known by everyone, like Arnault's from 'La Feuille de Rose and La Feuille de Laurier.'

How are we to account for this indifference following hard upon so much admiration? Which epoch was and is right; Lemercier's or ours? Whence this oblivion, and what was Lemercier?

The first act of M. Lemercier's life is sufficiently characteristic to be recorded here.

One day the reading committee of the Théâtre-Français met to listen to the initial work of a young author, very highly recommended by the Court. It was before '89, and as a matter of course, the work was a tragedy. Enter, the poet: the actors (Mdlle. Contat, Molé, Préville among the number) look at one another in dumb surprise; the poet appeared to be a mere child. Long, fair hair drooping on his shoulders, an absolutely beardless chin, large, blue, gentle eyes, a tiny walking-stick to support his slightly limping gait and a tutor to accompany him. By a mere glance the actors sum up the situation. 'This is the son of some noble family,' they signal to one another, 'the tutor has written the tragedy and the pupil will carry away the honours of it; an additional ornament to his scutcheon.' 'I suppose this gentleman will read the tragedy?' says Mdlle. Contat pointing to the tutor.

'No, madame, I will read it myself,' replies the boy in a gentle voice, and forthwith commences his task. He reads well and the work meets with a good deal of

approval, for side by side with many weak passages, there are some very clever scenes and touching lines. The work is accepted unanimously and the lad who had seemed to take the reading as a matter of course remains equally calm amidst the praise and criticism. 'I'll soon get at the bottom of this,' says Mdlle. Contat in a whisper to Molé. Then she turns to M. Lemerrier. 'Monsieur, we are all exceedingly delighted at what we have heard. Nevertheless, I noticed in the second act a scene which would be all the better for some alterations.' 'Which are the alterations you would like, I shall be pleased if you will point them out.' Thereupon Mdlle. Contat explains. 'Your criticisms are exceedingly just,' replies the child as calmly as ever, 'and in two or three days I'll bring you the scene corrected as you suggested.' 'Two or three days,' says Mdlle. Contat, 'two or three days is far too long both for our impatience and your talent, monsieur. I feel sure that two or three hours will be quite sufficient. And if you could manage to carry out these changes immediately . . . ' 'Immediately,' interrupts the tutor sharply, 'that's impossible.' 'That's it,' says Mdlle. Contat to herself. 'M. Lemerrier is tired with reading.' 'I,' replies the boy, 'I am not tired at all. Madame, you'll have the scenes this very evening.' 'Why this evening?' insists Mdlle. Contat; 'why not as I asked you, directly?' 'Directly?' 'Yes, directly, why not? I am most anxious to have this scene altered. Our stage-

manager will be delighted to lend you his room; no one will interrupt you—and you will have it all to yourself, for monsieur will do us the honour to remain with us,’ she added turning to the tutor—‘and the moment you have finished—’ ‘I’ll be only too pleased,’ replied the boy, ‘let them take me to the stage-manager’s room.’

An hour afterwards he came back with the scene re-written and materially improved. This time there could not be the slightest suspicion. The piece was immediately *underlined*. The marvellous boy became the talk of the town, and curiosity grew stronger still when it was given forth that he was the godson of the Princesse de Lamballe. At the first performance both the Court and city notabilities foregathered in large numbers.¹ Queen² Marie-Antoinette occupied the royal box with the author’s³ godmother. The piece is a great success, the house rings with deafening applause. The rumour spreads that the young author is in the royal box and the spectators clamour for a glimpse of him. The Queen herself presents him to the public and embraces him amidst universal cheers. There is only one person who remains perfectly calm and self-possessed amidst the general excitement, and that is the fourteen-year-old poet. Nevertheless, polite and gracious as he was throughout his subsequent career, he goes to thank the actors for their co-operation, then he asks the prompter to give him the manuscript in order to effect some alterations.

He takes it with him and next morning the actors receive the following letter :

‘MESSIEURS.—I am deeply moved by my success of yesterday, but I cherish no illusions with regard to it. My piece is the work of a child, and it is the child whom the public has applauded in order to encourage him. There is only one way open to me to show myself worthy of its lenient verdict, *i.e.* not to presume upon it. Such kindness is very well for once, it might fail at the second time of asking, hence, I withdraw my work and will endeavour to make my second tragedy more worthy of your talent.’

Great excitement at the theatre, the management refuses to take the play off the bills, it hopes to secure a few profitable performances ; but the author remains obdurate, and as he is known to stand well with the Court, the comedians are fain to submit to his decision.

What might not have been expected from such a child.

Meanwhile the Revolution breaks out when M. Lemer cier is but eighteen. Without flinging himself into the movement, his ardent mental curiosity and his natural courage prompt him to be a spectator of all the great events ; wherever there is a fête, a disturbance or a mere spectacle, wherever the battle rages he is to the fore. The danger attracts him

At every meeting of the Jacobin Club, he takes his seat among the *tricoteuses*, and these horrible females, seeing that beardless young fellow always in the same seat, never uttering a word, his eyes fixed on the orators and greedily swallowing every syllable that falls from their lips, give him the nickname of the 'Idiot.' The Idiot was simply educating himself morally, his silent passage amidst the catastrophes of those bloody years was to him like a journey through the terrible poem of Dante. He emerged from it a man ; his character steeled, the heart fortified, and at the same time susceptible to every softer feeling, a passionate admirer of liberty, marred though it was by licence, and abhorring licence with all the strength of his love of liberty ; in short a republican, according to the definition of Montesquieu who maintains that virtue is the essential foundation of the Republic. But Lemer cier borrowed his definition of the monarchy and added honour to virtue.

Between the Reign of Terror and '97, three dramatic works 'Clarisse Harlow,' 'Le Lévite d'Ephraïm' and 'Le Tartufe Révolutionnaire' maintained his reputation with the public ; they failed, however, to satisfy his literary ambition—for he refused to have them printed—and his insatiable intellectual ardour, for he studied both painting and medicine at the same time.

It was David who first guided his brush. Struck with the extraordinary gifts of the young fellow he

took a delight in associating him with his work. When he was sent by the Convention to take the portrait of Lepelletier de Saint-Fargeau after the latter had been assassinated by Pâris, it was Lemer cier whom he took with him to assist him. The corpse had been deposited in one of the basement apartments of the Tuileries; the artist shut himself up in it, and when alone with his pupil told him to fetch a fowl and a knife. The moment he had got what he wanted, he spread a large sheet over the corpse, then cutting the fowl's throat, he besprinkled the sheet with the blood. Such striving after realism may well cause surprise in connection with the painter of the *Léonidas* and the *Death of Socrates*. Most people remember the portrait of Marat. That of Lepelletier was finished before the day was out. Lemer cier has often described to me in enthusiastic terms the day's work of that man of genius; told me of the eyes ardently fixed on that corpse, of that brush excitedly tracking the fast waning traces of life on that face which was decomposing visibly. If a stupid political scruple had not destroyed that masterpiece, it would have proved once more that great artists, however enamoured of the idealistic are neither ignorant nor contemptuous of nature; that if they happen now and again to soar too much above it, it is not from disdain of that which is, and is visible to everyone, but from an ardent passion for that which can only be seen

by the imagination. Hence, when accident brings them back violently face to face with nature, they embrace her—as Montaigne would say—with a more feverish straining, and in depicting her they manage to display a vigour of touch and a grandeur of execution denied to those who entrench themselves in the vulgar reality. Their constant intercourse with the beautiful has had the effect of teaching them the ‘truly true,’ for the beautiful is only the sublime rendering of ‘the visibly true.’

Poetry which had merely lent M. Lemer cier to painting soon claimed him again as her own, and as for the science of medicine it was love that made him relinquish it. In the thick of his anatomical studies, he fell in love with a young girl of matchless beauty. One day while seated close to her, he feels himself all at once a prey to the most weird fascination. His anatomical science persists in pursuing him while near her; his looks become a dissecting knife; in spite of himself, his eyes steadily fixed upon that dear face, he strips it of its complexion, of its freshness, in spite of himself he traces beneath the radiant flesh the system of fibres, muscles and nerves; he dissects them; in short this delightful head becomes to him that of a skeleton. Horror stricken, he endeavours to exorcise the vision and to fly from the spot; but the moment he returns next morning to the presence of that well-beloved face, this infernal work of dissection recommences.

Seized with horror, he flings from him the horrible science that kills the faculty of loving within his breast and sings his feelings of resentment in the 'Panhypocrisiade' by attributing them to Copernicus.

This is how Copernicus describes the disgust that has made him abandon medicine and impelled him to study astronomy :

'J'ai trop souvent au sein d'une victime humaine
Cherché par où l'artère est unie à la veine
Et n'ai trouvé dans l'homme, au grand jour depouillé,
Qu'un labyrinthe obscur où je me suis souillé.
J'ai reculé, j'ai fui ce néant de moi-même,
Et, me réfugiant dans la raison suprême,
J'ai repoussé cet art qui m'offrait trop souvent
L'aspect de l'homme éteint dans l'homme encor vivant.'

Like Copernicus, M. Lemer cier sought refuge in 'la raison suprême,' that is in art, and art did not withhold her generous reward for long.

Every great artist has his moment of blossoming, I might say of explosion, when his talent suddenly emerges from its limbo, bursts forth and takes victorious possession of his fellow-men. 'Le Cid' and 'Andromaque' gave to Corneille and to Racine that sudden conquest of fame. Well, M. Lemer cier, who, at six o'clock in the evening of the 24th April 1797, was only a distinguished young writer, found himself famous next morning. 'Agamemnon' had been played; it was not a mere success, but a veritable triumph. The public hailed him as the direct heir of our grand poets. All his comrades proclaimed him a master of his art. My father had had the same idea,

and tried at the same time to find the subject of a tragedy in Agamemnon. They confided their projects to one another. My father who was an ardent admirer of the 'Andromache' of Euripides intended to make Cassandra the representative of those royal captives whom the servitude of antiquity condemned to the love and couch of their master. 'I am afraid you are wrong,' said Lemer cier emphatically. 'It is not from Euripides that you should try to get your inspiration for this terrible tragedy, but from Æschylus. Do not meddle with Cassandra. Leave Cassandra untarnished, for Cassandra is the lamp that sheds its solitary light across the shadow of the sanctuary.' My father who felt that Lemer cier was right, left the coast clear to him.

M. Delaroche once told me that when his *Jane Grey* was exhibited, he mingled, on the very day of the opening of the Salon, with the crowd in order to gather their impressions. As he stood there, wholly engrossed by the pleasure of listening to the enthusiastic exclamations his picture evoked, he felt a slight tap on the shoulder, and on turning round beheld an old man who said to him, 'Take my advice, M. Delaroche and enjoy this day to the full, for you will never get another like it.'

Well, M. Lemer cier failed to get another day like that of the first performance of 'Agamemnon.' Why? Did he cease to write after that work? Not at all. During the next thirty years, works of the

most diverse nature flowed from his pen. Did his creative faculties show a falling off? Again, no. As a thinker, as a playwright and poet, he was by far more original than in 'Agamemnon.' The latter is only a work of talent, and there are touches of genius in his other productions, and yet, though he could still boast of many successes, no further triumphs were vouchsafed to him. In all his attempts the public watched him with interest and curiosity, at times with more passionate concern, oftenest in a defensive attitude. This resistance merely had the effect of increasing the vitality Lemercier brought to bear on his labours as well as on his recreations; and at this point I may be permitted perhaps to draw attention to a curious facet of that exceptional temperament.

Lord Byron was lame of one foot, and the deformity influenced his life to a great extent. Like all men of mettle, he felt the need to fight against the injustice of nature and to convict her of powerlessness. He made it a point to be a better swimmer, a better boxer, a better horseman than those who had a perfect and complete set of limbs. When he crossed the Straits of Abydos it was less to show his prowess as a swimmer than to fling a challenge to his misshapen foot. This explains to a certain extent the violent ardour with which M. Lemercier engaged in all bodily exercise, and launched into all kind of romantic love adventures and bold exploits. His exhibition of daring and passion were so many protests. Nature

had treated him in even a more stepmotherly fashion than she treated Lord Byron, for M. Lemer cier was totally disabled on one side; one hand and one foot absolutely refused their service; nevertheless there was neither peril nor fatigue connected with the practice of arms or riding, which he did not make it a point of confronting boldly. Intimately mixed up with the somewhat roystering set of the young generals of the Directory and the Consulate, he astonished even these by his displays of daring. On one occasion after a supper, he laughingly acquiesced in a plan for winding up the evening with a new game. Each guest provided himself with a pistol and they set to chasing one another round the room, firing all the while.

His manners, though, contrasted strangely with those eccentric doings. In private he was gentle, polite and courteous;—gracious to a degree. One evening he was seated on a low stool in the gangway of the first gallery of the Théâtre-Français. Enter a young officer, making a great deal of noise, slamming the door violently behind him and taking his stand right in front of M. Lemer cier. ‘Monsieur,’ says the poet very gently, ‘you prevent my seeing anything.’ The officer turns round and stares from his towering height at the little, inoffensive looking civilian, so humbly seated on his low stool, and resumes his former position. ‘Monsieur,’ repeats M. Lemer cier, more emphatically, ‘I have told you that you pre-

vent me from seeing the stage, and I command you to get out of my way.' 'You command,' retorts his interlocutor in a tone of contempt; 'do you know to whom you are speaking? You are speaking to a man who brought back the standards from the army of Italy.' 'That's very possible, monsieur, seeing that it was an ass which carried Christ.' As a matter of course, there was a duel and the officer had his arm broken by a bullet.

It was amidst this life of excess, of pleasures and diversions of all kinds that he produced works which would have sufficed for the labour of many men.

He boldly grapples with everything and stamps it with his own individuality; poems, tragedies, ancient and modern subjects, subjects of mere fancy, philosophical subjects; in short there is not a nook or corner in the domain of art into which he does not venture and whence he does not bring back a golden palm. He is the only man of his time who studies Shakespeare thoroughly, not like Ducis, who merely aims at extracting the pathetic and romantic element, but in order to get at the secret of that deeply-pondered delineation of historical personages, he is the only man of his time who attempts a direct and intimate intercourse with the genius of Dante, to whom he dedicates his curious poem, 'Panhypocrisiade';—he is the only man of his time, or at any rate the only man besides André Chénier, who endeavours to poetise science; he publishes

'l'Atlantiade,' in the composing of which physiology, astronomy, geology and natural history inspire him with six thousand lines, displaying frequent instances of vigorous thought and full of startling word-pictures ; he is the only man of his time who conceives the magnificent idea of founding a national theatre, of representing in a dramatic form the history of France by the sequential portrayal of the grandest periods and the greatest men of French annals. Clovis, Frédégonde and Brunhild would personify the barbarous times; Charlemagne, Imperial France ; Philippe Auguste, the feudal period ; Charles VI, the Hundred Years' War ; the States-General of Blois, the League ; 'La Journée des Dupes,'* the Fronde. The fate of his works is to the full as strange as the works themselves. Out of fifteen of his pieces nine or ten fail lamentably on the first night. His wife used to say in her pleasant way : 'My death, whenever it comes, will be of a first night.' But, strange to relate, his reputation grew with each of his failures. There were such original scenes, such flashes of potent genius in everything that came from his pen as to make the public whilst hissing the works admire the author. The most curious of all things, perhaps, was his attitude during those first nights. One of his friends being at the wings with him at the very

* The 11th November 1630, when Richelieu who was supposed to have been ruined by Marie de Médicis and Gaston d'Orléans, resumed all his former influence over Louis XIII and duped his enemies.—TR.

moment when a certain third act provoked a perfect volley of catcalls and hisses, trembled slightly in spite of himself. 'Don't frighten yourself,' said Lemer cier, that's nothing to what you'll hear by and by.'

Some critics conceived doubts with regard to the genuineness of his calm demeanour and finally taxed him with simulating it. Lemer cier proposed a test to them. 'We'll make a bet,' he said. 'In a few months there will be a new tragedy of mine. Unless I am mistaken, the fifth act will be considerably hissed. Well, Doctor Marc' (the physician attached to the theatre) 'shall feel my pulse before the performance, he shall do the same during the storm, and I'll wager that there shall not be a single beat more afterwards than there was before.' The wager was accepted, and Lemer cier won it.

On one occasion at the Odéon after a more than stormy performance, Lemer cier makes his appearance in the green-room, where he is immediately taken possession of by the interpreters of his work. But instead of submitting to the verdict, he defends his piece with such 'go' and cleverness, chaffs his detractors so good-naturedly, showing them so clearly that people had hissed his play simply because they did not understand it, 'as to make us feel positively contrite,' to use the words of Germain Delavigne, who told me the story. '*We* looked as if we had been hissed, not he.'

In spite of his failures, the actors, those 'faithful

attendants on success,' over and over again put their trust in him. Talma played one of his last works, and the history of that play, 'Jane Shore,' is almost a play in itself.

Lemercier had deliberately drawn a hunchbacked, misshapen Richard, paralyzed in one arm; nor did he, in his instructions to the actor, confine himself merely to the spirit of the part: he gave him lessons in imitating deformity.

Afflicted like Richard, Lemercier took his own hand as the subject for demonstration, and he taught Talma its habits, attitudes, its attempted movements, its inertness. Talma threw himself so ardently into the thing as to contract a violent and stubborn pain in the muscles of the shoulder. Nor was this all. Lemercier showed him at the same time in his own person how elegance, grace and distinction may go hand in hand in the same man with deformity; and Talma's genius eagerly seizing this dual character, 'carried himself throughout the drama with the sinuous suppleness of the tiger,'—to quote Lemercier's own words. He was simply horrible without being vulgar, preserving in his darkest and most ferocious moments the semblance of a prince and a courtier. On the second night he gave a striking proof of this. In the scene with Alicia where he endeavours to crush her with the most terrible threats, the bracelet of the actress got unfastened and dropped to the ground. Talma's frenzy is stilled as if by magic,

he stoops, picks up the bracelet, fastens it with princely courtesy round Alicia's wrist, after which his anger gets the better of him once more, and he finishes the scene with the ferocious impetuosity of an executioner.

The effect was electrical. Talma was asked to repeat the scene next evening and declined. 'In our art,' he said, 'there are accidental inspirations which would simply become so many vulgar tricks if they were changed into habits.'

Nevertheless, the piece only obtained a partial success and disappeared promptly from the bills. But another from the same pen, 'Christophe Colomb,' was soon put in rehearsal and gave rise to a sufficiently curious, albeit trivial fact.

At one of the rehearsals, one of the actors comes up to M. Lemercier, and says somewhat timidly: 'Monsieur, there are in my part a couple of lines of which I feel rather afraid.' 'Which are they?' asks Lemercier. 'Here they are:

"Et quand à ces coquins,
Il faut les envoyer au pays des requins."

'Well, what is there to be afraid of?' says M. Lemercier.

'I'm afraid of being laughed at, and if you do not mind, I'll suggest a slight alteration.'

'Not at all, let's hear it.'

'I'd put—

“Et quand à ces brigands
Il faut les envoyer au pays des merlans.”

M. Lemer cier merely smiled, and did not adopt the suggestion.

Whence then came that firm and tranquil confidence in himself? Was it merely so much puerile vanity? By no means. Pride had cured him of vanity, just as the passionate craving for immortality had extinguished in him the love of transient fame. No man has ever done less for his own fame than Lemer cier. To scheme and to contrive, to disarm criticism by soft speeches was absolutely foreign to his nature. Such tactics, however innocent in reality, were odious to him. He aimed higher; he had faith in the verdict of posterity. If he felt indifferent with regard to the success of the hour, it was because he expected time to grant him a more durable success. ‘I never write anything without asking myself what Corneille, Sophocles or Shakespeare would think of it,’ he said. He lived in the sight of the immortals and felt himself belonging to their race. His dedication of the ‘Panhypocrisiade’ is a grand proof of it.

‘Deathless Dante, where will this letter reach thee? I address thee in unknown regions, in the place of sojourn thrown open by immortality to the sublime souls of every great genius. A winged messenger, the imagination, will carry it to thee in the space where thou soarest with them.

‘Show this poem, after thou hast read it through,

to Michael - Angelo, to Shakespeare and even to worthy Master Rabelais, and if the originality of this kind of theatrical epic seems to them in harmony with thy gigantic inventions and with the independence of the genius of those around thee, consult them on its duration. Smiling to themselves, perhaps, at the judgments of our modern doctors, they may predict for it more than twenty editions before another century has dawned, albeit that it is without the code of the classics.'

The latter words bring us back to the problem propounded at the beginning of this essay, and now is the time to endeavour to ascertain why there remains nothing but the name of so powerful a creator, who was so admired and so fully cognisant of his own force. To what are we to ascribe the fact of his not having produced more durable works? I repeat, to what? To the date of his birth. He came too soon. He is a man of the nineteenth century groping his way at the end of the eighteenth. His imagination, his conceptions, his intellectual temperament belong to one epoch, his style to another. Fable shows us certain mythological beings, partly transformed into trees, struggling against the stifling hug of the rough bark which takes possession of their body, confines their limbs and finally chokes their voice. Such is the image of the genius of Lemercier. He has been smothered by the style of his time. To this independent intellect, born to soar in the bound-

less skies, to scan vast horizons, all the daring resources of modern poetry, all the untrammelled freedom claimed by our grand school of poetry and history would have scarcely sufficed to express his ideas ; and what instrument did he find ready to his hand ? A rhetorical language and a conventional art. No doubt, had he been more powerful he would have burst asunder the mould of that style, just as he burst asunder the mould of those ideas ; he would have made for himself a language of his own. But to do this, it wanted a genius for form, and he only possessed the genius of invention. He was a poet of the first water who had only at his service a 'rhymester' belonging to the second ; hence, an unfortunate discord in his work. He thinks like a revolutionary and too often writes like a reactionary. A striking proof of this may be found in the following : When he conceived the idea of a national theatre, he did not confine himself, like the writers of his time, to a mere study of the historians. He plunged into original documents, ransacked every chronicle, steeped himself in local colouring and the various passions of those periods ; then, when the time came for carrying out his design, as if some evil genius had cast a spell over him, he dressed his personages in one uniform noble garb and endowed them with either vague or stilted language which reminds one at times of Augustin Thierry having borrowed the pen of Anquetil. His talent is like his body ; only one side of it is

truly alive. But the power and originality of that one half of a great poet is plain enough. There is not a single work of his that does not reveal something altogether new in the way of beauty. The third act of 'Agamemnon' is worthy of Æschylus himself. The apparition of young Orestes at the dénouement is like a creation of Shakespeare. 'Pinto' remains an absolutely new form of stage play, it is the comedy of tragedy. The 'Panhypocrisiade' is full of startling scenes and sublime passages. Could there be anything more tragic than the scene where little Charles VII, terror stricken at his father's madness, quakes at the thought of inheriting the malady? Is not that scene in 'Frédégonde et Brunehaut' a stroke of genius? I allude to the scene in which the author confronts the two women, hating one another with an irreconcilable hatred, the hatred of the servant and the hatred of the sovereign; the low-bred hatred mingled with rage, the well-bred hatred mingled with scorn. The works of Lemer cier strike me as ore rich in precious metal, but often deeply imbedded. Break the stone and you will find the gold.

Moreover, his heart and character contribute in no small measure to the completion of his talent. The attainment of fame, and a straightforward and virtuous course were his chief aims in life. If he failed to attain the first aim, assuredly he did not miss the second. I have only to quote his conduct with the Emperor as a

proof. When they were both young the bond between them was a close one. It was M. Lemer cier who prevailed upon Joséphine to marry Bonaparte. She cared but little for that small, yellowish-looking, angular officer, who was abrupt in manner and very careless of his personal appearance. She was rather afraid of him. The 13th Vendémiaire and the manner in which on that day he swept the insurrectionary crowd from the steps of St Roch had raised his reputation in military circles; but Joséphine, the elegant, frivolous woman of the world, fond of pleasure, failed to detect the great man behind that strange personage, whose austere beauty almost seemed 'ugliness amidst the 'finikin' graces of the Directory. Lemer cier overcame her hesitation with one word. 'My dear madame, be guided by me, marry Vendémiaire.' Bonaparte, on his side, and with his potent faculty for reading people, quickly perceived Lemer cier's worth. He became as fond of him as it was in his nature to be fond of anyone, and what was more rare still with him, he respected him. His inherent and as yet instinctive contempt for his fellow-men could not have been but surprised at meeting with a man whom he felt to be unassailable by no matter what temptation; and his marvellous intelligence never tired of exploring that mind whence ideas flowed forth, inexhaustible like a natural spring. He took him with him to Malmaison, and there, evening after evening, made him tell him the history of France.

Lemercier entered with enthusiasm into the spirit of those narratives, trembling with joy at the idea of contributing something to the moral greatness of him whom he believed to have been born for the liberty as well as the glory of France.

Later on the bond between M. Lemercier and Bonaparte entered upon its second phase. I found a curious trace of it in a conversation reported *textually* (the expression is his) by M. Lemercier himself, and in which the First Consul shows himself in a somewhat new light as a literary critic. It was in 1800, when M. Lemercier had sent a copy of his poem on Alexander and Homer to the First Consul. Next day he received an invitation to dine at Malmaison. The company was a large one and the conversation having turned on epic *versus* didactic poetry, one of the guests asserted the superiority of the latter over the former. Bonaparte happened to be passing at that moment. 'What does Lemercier think of it?' he asked. 'I am in favour of the epic poem,' was the answer. 'You are right,' said Bonaparte; 'narrative is more dramatic; actions strike more forcibly than precepts. Judge for yourself. Alexander chose Homer for his poet, Augustus chose Virgil; as for myself, I only had Ossian; the others were already taken.

Later on, when the company was breaking up and M. Lemercier about to retire with the other guests, Bonaparte said, 'Don't go, I wish to speak to you.'

So he remained in the drawing-room with Madame Bonaparte and two generals. The First Consul went out, but immediately afterwards reappeared laughing and with a paper-covered book in his hand; it was M. Lemer cier's poem. Bonaparte had cut the last leaves with his finger, having only looked at the lines dealing with Alexander. 'Oh, oh,' he said, 'it appears to me that you do not care for conquerors; nevertheless, you have done justice to their grand deeds. Your list of ancient and modern warriors is instructive. Let us look through it together.' He sat down and made a sign for the poet to do the same. The two generals moved to a sofa where they seated themselves side by side, and remained during the conversation absolutely indifferent, with outstretched legs and arms folded across their chests, half asleep. Madame Bonaparte, on a seat close to the table, was doing some embroidery and every now and then put her work in her lap, glancing at the two men with anxious concern.

Lemer cier took up the poem in order to read aloud the passages pointed out, but the First Consul snatched it out of his hand, saying, 'I am going to read it and look for myself.' He stopped at the following passages, commenting as he went.

'Et Salamine, écueil des flottes de Xerxès
D'un Ulysse nouveaux signalant les essais. . . '

'To whom do you refer there? Oh, I see, Themistocles; he was as crafty and as strong as Ulysses.'

When he got to Cæsar he read the whole passage aloud and very attentively ; then exclaimed : ‘One day, I too will write my Commentaries. . . . Your summary of his, in your verses, seems to me most excellent. Let us see what comes next.’ He went on, stopping at almost every word of the battle of Cannæ.

“Quand l’habile ennemi, dont il crut triompher
L’attendit dans ses bras qui devaient l’étouffer.”

‘That’s it exactly, he made his main body fall back, in order to hem in the Romans to the right and left ; I am sorry you did not explain that the movement was carried out by the cavalry.’ ‘I was under the impression that I had expressed that as far as poetical conciseness would allow me by using the words “in his arms” to illustrate the movements of the wings of his army,’ replied the author,

‘In that case, the comparison is perfect, and what is better still, short and accurate. I am not fond of long-winded descriptions.

“Il était temps enfin qu’un jeune homme invincible
Fit tomber à Zama ce cyclope terrible.”

‘You are alluding to Scipio who defeated this famous one-eyed captain ; Scipio whom they named *Africanus*, as they call me *l’Italique*. . . . And,’ he added smiling, ‘depend upon it, I’ll not stop at that.’ ‘I have a presentiment to that effect,’ replied Lemer cier. ‘They already wish to give you the

title of *le Britannique*, but beware of it.' We looked at one another fixedly and in silence, wrote M. Lemer cier, and all at once, he said in a very serious tone: 'Which of these great men of antiquity seems to you the greatest?' 'Annibal,' I replied. 'I agree with you. You must have weighed all very carefully to have written such a work, but I expected you to say Cæsar. . . . Cæsar is the poet's hero.' 'To my mind, he is not the greatest captain, I prefer. . . .' 'Whom do you prefer? . . . Brutus, perhaps, the hero of the democrats. . . . Do you belong to them?' 'No, neither Brutus the younger, nor Jules Cæsar are the heroes of my predilection, I should have liked neither the one nor the other because I dislike tyrants and assassins.' 'These are two very good reasons,' he answered, with a kind of affectionate glance, while a faint flush came into his cheeks, then he went on animatedly and in the most vehement and dogmatic tone: 'Your judgment is absolutely correct, from a military point of view, with regard to Annibal, you, who do not belong to the profession. Annibal was the greatest captain the world has seen. Your lines on him are magnificent. But in what way and for what reason did he seem so remarkable to you?' 'Because, abandoned, betrayed by Carthage which he served so well, he has always supported himself in the enemy's country by his own resources; because he knew how to convert into new troops the foreign nations he met on

his way. A footnote in the poem will prove to you that I have not even adopted the opinion reproaching him with his stay amidst "the delights of Capua." 'I had already noticed it and am pleased to think that you did not. Those chatterboxes of historians judge our doings too glibly in the silence of their studies.' I may interrupt my narrative for a moment to point out that M. Lemercier was the only man of his time who placed Annibal on so lofty a pedestal. 'The delights of Capua' had become a hackneyed expression, a proverb. Bonaparte who went on reading stopped at Henri IV, of whom he said; '*That poor Henri IV; if ever a man dragged his wretched body here, there and everywhere, it was he. A brave and good ruler; the Jesuits had him killed.*' Passing on to Frederick II, he said: 'Frederick, Frederick, it is Voltaire and the encyclopedists who have magnified his reputation, because he had showed them such favour.' 'I think not,' replied Lemercier, 'it is the Seven Years' War, and especially the unvarnished account he gave of it with an utter contempt of sham glory. His country rose and declined with him, hence one might characteristically call him "the Epaminondas of Kings."' 'That is a very beautiful expression; but I will efface his kingdom from the map.' 'You will not be able to efface the recollection of "philosophy seated on a throne," for that is a rare sight;' retorted the poet. 'Softly, softly, *my good* Lemercier, I have no such intention.'

All at once he broke off reading to ask an unexpected question. 'You have told me whom you consider the greatest captain of antiquity, which of the moderns seem to you superior to the others?'

'If ever there was a good opportunity for flattering him, I had it there,' said M. Lemer cier, '*but neither of us* was thinking of himself, and I answered him that in my opinion, the greatest captain was Prince Eugène.' 'Why?' remarked Bonaparte, 'I fully expected you to say Turenne. What a pity he died before giving battle to Montecuculi. Two real Fabiuses pitted against one another. But you quickly pass by Montecuculi,' he added, still turning over the pages. 'His name sounds discordant. With you poets there is no chance of immortality when one has an uncouth name. Never mind, tell me why you prefer Eugène?' Lemer cier replied, (and the reply is very striking in a poet of those days; one might almost be listening to M. Thiers) that having read many memoirs, military treatises, having examined maps and strategical plans, and having compared captains with one another, Eugène had impressed him with the idea of having been the boldest and most careful at the same time. 'You are right,' assented Bonaparte, 'as a model he is unique.' 'You yourself have taught me to appreciate him,' remarked Lemer cier. 'I!' exclaimed Bonaparte. 'Why, we have never talked about him.' 'Yes, you, because you suspended the siege of Mantua and left, to

fling yourself upon an enemy a long distance off whom you defeated and forestalled; you did not remain inactive behind your own lines like the French general of old whom Prince Eugène so cleverly surprised and crushed. Hence, in avoiding the mistake of the one, you took example by the genius of the other. That lesson opened my eyes.' 'Oh, oh, I'm beginning to conclude that you wrote nothing at hazard. These are things of which the majority of people in my camps fail to catch the drift.' Then he came back to the King of Prussia. 'Yes, Frederick played the flute. I too used to practise music in days gone by.'

Bonaparte, still turning over the leaves of the book in an excited manner, and stopping at the passages that had struck him, stumbled upon the following eulogy of the French—

* Inépuisable Antée, et vrai fils de la Terre,
Pour vaincre en tous les temps, ne quitte point ta mère.'

'What was the idea that inspired these lines?' he said. 'They are directed against you;' replied Lemer cier. 'Why?' 'Because the papers have said that you contemplate an invasion of England.' He laughed outright.

In the next paragraph he recognised some portraits of himself, the words Arcola, Rivoli, Marengo caused a flattering sensation. 'I cannot but thank you for this,' he said, 'at the same time I feel bound to take

objection. You have certainly treated me with great honour and placed me in a very goodly company of heroes, but you wind up with two lines which, to say the least, appear strange to some people.'

'While saying these words,' writes M. Lemer cier, 'his looks told me that someone had tried to poison his mind against me by some malicious insinuation ; he had not seen my book before the previous day. Here is the first line—

'Sache combler l'espoir qu'ont donné tes hauts faits.'

'This is less a eulogy than an injunction on your part,' he remarked. 'And then you go on,

"Moderne Miltiade, égale Périclès."

'This second line,' I replied, 'explains the first and points out what we hope for in you. The glory of Périclès is founded upon his patronage of art, letters and commerce, all of which he caused to flourish under his beneficent government. His name has become attached to his century, like those of Augustus, the Medici and Louis XIV to theirs. Is it unsuitable then to do a similar thing with regard to the First Consul of France?' 'I quite understand that, but why the name of Miltiades coupled with it?' 'Because Pericles' fame was not based upon warlike exploits, while Miltiades, like yourself owed his great reputation in the Republic to them. By associating you with both, I wished to point out that you would add your civil virtues to your military qualities.

Does that idea offend you?' 'It does not present itself in the same light to different minds, for if you look at it in another sense, it would suggest to our Athenians of to-day that it would be good policy to fling Miltiades into prison. Isn't that it? Why you colour up at the very idea.' 'And you, you have grown quite pale; these are our respective colours when an idea moves us, and I may frankly confess that I am surprised at that one.' 'The idea that troubles you, is not mine by any means;' added Bonaparte, 'but that's the interpretation put upon it, seeing that M*** stated it to me not later than yesterday.' 'Indeed,' replied M. Lemer cier somewhat violently, 'I can only suppose that he is mistaken with regard to me, for I do not wish to suspect him of deliberate baseness and wickedness.'

'Thereupon,' writes M. Lemer cier, 'the First Consul caught hold of my hand affectionately and changed the subject, by taking up the book once more. 'Let us have done with this "tall" talk. Your praise of Desaix has gone straight to my heart. I rather *munched* your verses while reading them to myself in order to examine and study them; I now want you to read them so as to enjoy them.' He handed me the book and I did as he wished; the moment I had finished, he rose telling me to come and see him very soon.

'This,' adds M. Lemer cier, 'was one of my conversations with the historical man, who, by destroying

our liberties, separated me from the man who had gloriously defended them. It was Napoleon and only Napoleon who disturbed my friendship with Bonaparte.'

The establishment of the Empire, in fact, dealt him a mortal blow. His dream had taken flight, his hero had fallen. When Napoleon sent for him, Lemer cier boldly told him that he might amuse himself by making the bed of the Bourbons afresh but that he should not sleep in it; and when at the institution of the Legion of Honour one of the first crosses was sent to Lemer cier, he declined it in a letter which has become historical.

Then began between the sovereign and the poet a struggle in which the latter alone preserved his dignity. An interdict is placed upon all the theatrical works of Lemer cier, he does not protest by as much as a word. They give him the hint that a mere petition on his part will remove the prohibition, he refuses to send it. The house which constituted the whole of his inheritance is required for public improvements and he himself is kept waiting for several years for the indemnity; he does not utter a word; he is told that a line from his hand to the Emperor will put an end to all further delay; he refuses to write it. He removes to a fifth floor, and lives in poverty by his pen, only emerging from his retreat and breaking his silence by some replies à la Corneille. One day, at a reception at the Tuileries where the Academy

had been commanded to attend, the Emperor caught sight of him standing in a corner of the room amidst a group of his fellow-academicians. With a wave of his hand he sweeps the others from his path and makes straight for the poet, saying, 'Well, Lemer cier, when are you going to write us a beautiful tragedy?' 'I am waiting, sire,' replies the poet. In 1812, on the eve of the Russian Campaign, the words sound like a prophecy.

At the fall of the Empire Lemer cier directed his bitterest sarcasm against the alliance of Imperialism and Liberalism. 'There are certain pacts which freedom has no right to contract. When it makes an alliance with despotism, no matter whether that despotism was the offspring of democracy or of feudalism it simply sullies itself.' This persistent and austere republicanism was such a thorough contrast to the monarchical and imperialistic worship into which France was divided, that this patriotic resentment was looked upon as merely so much personal hatred. But the day came when it was fully proved that the lofty soul could cherish none but lofty thoughts. That day was the 21st May 1821, when there rang through Paris the cry of 'The Emperor is dead.' At that cry, Lemer cier, stricken to the heart, burst into tears. For whom then did he mourn? Not for the man who had died a fortnight before, but for the man who had died twenty-five years before, not for the Emperor but for the First Consul, not for Napoleon, but for

Bonaparte, his friend of yore, the great man in whom his hopes for France had centred, the Washington of genius who had haunted his dreams. Tears like these are all sufficient to sketch the man. And throughout his life he was the man to shed such tears. A kind of heroism pervaded his every action. His was absolute sincerity, his devotion knew no limits, his disinterestedness was almost sublime. He never would touch author's fees for his works, and whatever he earned he spent in charity. 'I agree with Boileau,' who said—

“Qu'on peut sans crime
Tirer de ses écrits un profit légitime;”

but, as far as I am concerned, my pen would drop from my hand, if, while at work, I had to reflect that this or that thought might bring me something. I should always be afraid to arrive at a state of mind in which *thought* and *gain* were convertible terms.' The man who spoke thus had earned the right to inscribe on his tomb the proud and simple epitaph—

HERE LIES

NEPOMUCENE LEMERCIER

He was an honest man and cultivated literature.

CHAPTER III

M. Jean-Nicolas Bouilly—His Reputation as a Sentimentalist.—His real Character.—His fondness for risky Stories.—Easily moved to Tears.—So was Scribe.—So is Sardou.—M. Bouilly's connection with Mirabeau.—An Anecdote of the great Orator.—M. Bouilly's Literary Sponsor.—M. Bouilly's Theatrical Pieces.—His Indifference to Criticism.—His Reply to it.—A Lecture by M. Legouv .—M. Legouv  on the Theatrical Profession.—Bouilly's Generosity.—His liking for Working-Men.—His Powers of Invention.—His Decline.—The Spirit in which he met it.—A curious way of teaching Orthography.—M. Bouilly's Stories for Children.—He is invited to the Tuileries.—The Death of his Daughter.—He takes to Freemasonry as a means of making Speeches.—His way of composing them.—The cause of his Death.—His Last Moments.

WHAT a strange creature reputation often makes of a man. The name of M. Bouilly* was in his own time and has remained in ours the symbol of mawkish sentimentality. Curiously enough, the man who was dubbed 'the tearful one' was the most jovial companion, the frankest incarnation of laughter, the most amusing story-teller I have known. Two score years spent amidst the hubbub of five or six revolutions, at the bar, in the discharge of his public duties, and in theatrical circles had made his brain a perfect

* Jean-Nicolas Bouilly, the author of a great number of plays and children's tales. He was M. Legouv 's trustee and co-guardian during the last eight years of the latter's minority and managed not only to repair the financial errors of his predecessor in that office, but to increase M. Legouv 's income by judicious investments.—TR.

storehouse of anecdote and epigram, of typical portraits, both tragic and comic, and he had the knack of reviving that vanished society in such a way as to make his listeners fancy that they were in the play-house. Truth to tell, what he liked best was 'spicy' stories (*histoires salées*), as our fathers used to call them. The more risky the story, the greater his eagerness to plunge headlong into it, and, let me add, the more skilful his way of getting out of it, especially if his audience happened to include a fair average of women. How did he accomplish this? Simply by his own contagious gaiety, by his frank and genuine laughter. I repeat, by his laughter. Whence then came his reputation? Was it a libel? By no means. His tears, in fact, flowed very easily, but it does not necessarily follow that a man is a 'wet blanket' because he is easily moved to tears. Two instances in proof of this, namely, Scribe and Sardou. Assuredly, no one will accuse either of these of mawkish sentimentality, yet, Scribe could neither read, relate or compose a touching scene without crying. I fancy I can see Scribe now, wiping his glasses a dozen times during the reading of the fifth act of '*Adrienne Lecouvreur*,' because they had become dimmed with his tears. One day, while deeply engaged in planning a pathetic situation he suddenly flung himself at my feet, and catching hold of both my hands, bent over them and burst out weeping like a child. When Sardou hears of some touching incident he weeps, when he reads

one of his moving dramas he weeps, when he is talking of people of whom he is fond he weeps. Are Scribe and Sardou to be called lachrymose or lackadaisical on that account? By no means. They are simply so much electrical apparatus. Their nerves are like wires that vibrate and emit sparks at the slightest touch. Such was M. Bouilly. I cannot, in fact, describe him better than by the three names he applied to himself. He called himself *the old liberal, the old dramatic carpenter, the old storyteller*. His political sponsor was Mirabeau. While still a young fellow, his first exploit had been an act of heroism. During a riot at Chinon, he deliberately faced a band of murderous ruffians and at the cost of a wound in the chin, saved the lives of a score of prisoners. This manly conduct had won for him the friendship of Mirabeau, and the impression produced by that extraordinary being upon him remained vivid to the last. There was one scene, though, which stood out from the rest, a scene in the Constituent Assembly. A doubt had been cast upon Mirabeau's right to the title of 'the people's friend.' Mirabeau positively leapt into the rostrum. 'Ah,' he exclaimed, 'Mirabeau is not the people's friend'; and forthwith he began to enumerate one by one, chapter by chapter as it were, all the services he had rendered the State, prefacing the enumeration of every individual act with the incriminating sentence which darted from his lips with the hissing sound of

an arrow speeding from the bow. Then he suddenly stopped short. 'Well, yes,' he went on, every word sounding like a clap of thunder, 'yes, you are right; Mirabeau is not the people's friend . . .' At the same time with an utter and startling disregard of conventionality, he unbuttons his waistcoat, tears away the ruffle of his shirt and striking his bare and hairy chest, he cries, 'Mirabeau is not the people's friend, he is the people himself.'

When M. Bouilly described that scene, his lips twitched, every feature quivered and his eyes were filled with tears. All the enthusiasm, somewhat theatrical perhaps, but withal genuine, of that period was for the moment revived in him.

Sedaine was his dramatic sponsor. To him he owed that art of composing, preparing and developing, which is the essence of a well-constructed stage play. People profess to make sport nowadays of the dramatic carpenters, they call them osteologists. Osteologists be it then. It seems to me that the human body is none the worse for having a carcass, and that architects are not absolutely wrong in planning a house before they build it. Racine said: 'When I have got my plan, I have got my piece.' He took no count of his beautiful verse, perhaps because he felt confident of being able to write beautiful verse, but doubtless because he knew that the beauty of his plan would, to a certain extent, contribute to the beauty of his verse. On the boards,

when the scene is ingenious, the most simple lines become so many sparkling ones. Thanks to his talent for composition, M. Bouilly's pieces held the bills successfully at the three principal theatres of Paris at the selfsame time, namely at the Comédie-Française, the Opéra-Comique and the Vaudeville. 'L'Abbé de l'Épée' is marked in the theatrical annals as one of the dramatic triumphs of the period. I transcribe textually from Goethe's 'Recollections.' 'I have just read a comic opera entitled "Les Deux Journées," by a M. Bouilly which strikes me as one of the most interesting and best constructed French pieces I know.' I have heard M. Scribe say over and over again that the revival of the Vaudeville dated from 'Fanchon la Vielleuse,' and 'Haine aux Femmes' by Bouilly. Finally, in *his time*, people said of him, in the style of *his time*: 'Bouilly marches towards the Temple of Fame with his *sword* dangling by his side, and he will want but *two days* to reach his goal.' Unfortunately, if there be nothing so brilliant as a theatrical success, neither is there anything so transient. Nevertheless, the work of the old dramatic carpenter is not altogether buried. I have a striking proof of it. About fifteen years ago M. Ballande asked me to give a lecture at one of those theatrical matinees of which he was virtually the inventor. I accepted on the condition that the piece to be performed should be, 'L'Abbé de l'Épée,'

and that 'L'Abbé de l'Épée' should be the subject of the lecture. So said, so done. I did not laud the work to the skies, I merely analysed it. Without attempting to praise the work or to apologise for introducing it, I merely confined myself to point out the architecture of the drama, or rather the architect of it at work. I endeavoured to admit the public at the creation of the work in the author's brain, leaving them afterwards to form their individual opinions. My attempt produced a considerable effect, and I had the satisfaction of seeing the work of my old friend received with unanimous and intense emotion. After several representations the curiosity of the public remained as strong as ever, and the piece made once more a tour throughout the whole of France, meeting everywhere with the same success ; hence, I feel convinced that if it had been written at a different period, that is, in a different style, it would have commanded a permanent place in the French repertory. If the dialogue were weeded in sundry places of its sentimental phraseology of the period—which would not be a difficult task—Sedaine's pupil would occupy a permanent place in the repertory like his master ; 'L'Abbé de l'Épée' would figure side by side with the 'Philosophe sans le savoir.'

We will, however, leave the work and talk of the author who is a useful exemplar of his class.

A good deal is said nowadays of what, for want of

a better term, I may call the 'suicidal professions'; every now and then we have a list of callings that are sometimes fatal to human life. I know of none beset with the many dangers of the dramatic career. There is no risk to the body, as in the manual callings, it is the character and the soul which are being jeopardised. The atmosphere of the dramatic career is as unwholesome as the vitiated air of the factory, as the rarefied air in the mine, for one lives side by side with the most ardent and deleterious vices of the human heart; envy, self-interest, self-esteem carried to selfishness. These terrible passions prevail in the dramatic career to so violent a degree as to tax the strength of the most evenly balanced minds in their defence against them. Success intoxicates you, failure has the most humiliating effect. The very publicity of everything connected with the stage adds a distinct bitterness and harshness to these alternatives. How many authors waste their heart's blood in watching the appearance and the disappearance of their names on and from the bills; in counting their receipts which dwindle, and computing those of their colleagues which rise; in feeding upon newspaper articles attacking them. It is a fact, though scarcely credible, that the most successful are often the most sensitive with regard to criticism. The most envied are not always proof against envying others. There is nothing more rare than a truly happy dramatic author. M. Bouilly was that *rara avis*. Of course,

he had his share of worry, annoyance and grief. Criticism in its cruellest form, bitter ridicule, pursued him relentlessly amidst all his success ; his very name was made a text for spiteful banter ; his work, according to some, was like his name.* Well, amidst all those spiteful attacks, exhibitions of jealousy, and excitement of all kinds, he went the even tenour of his way, smiling, good-natured, calm and slightly satirical. When they brought him an article falling foul of him, he quietly went to his writing table, took from one of its drawers a pocket-book, bound in green morocco and began to add up the profits derived from his dramatic works during the year. ‘When the writer of this article shall have earned as much as that, I will believe in his remarks ; until then, I prefer to believe in the public and in the cashier of the theatre. It is not a question of self-respect, it is a question of figures.’

His was indeed a curious character which deserves a more detailed description; the most violent contrasts seemed to have been blended into one harmonious whole. I have never met with a more generous and at the same time more careful man. Optimistic to a degree, his optimism stopped short at credulity; he was both very sentimental and very practical. The light, small books, stitched in greyish-blue covers,

* The words *Bouilly*, *bouilli*, and *bouillie* sound alike in French. *Bouilli* is the meat from which the nutriment has been extracted for soup ; *bouillie* is a dish of farinaceous food for children or invalids.—TR.

representing the eight years of his trusteeship, which he handed me on the day I came of age constitute his true portrait; figures and sentiment march side by side in them. M. Bouilly had always enough and to spare, because he never wasted his substance. M. Bouilly never took a cab without calling the cabman 'my fine fellow,' and without telling him that he would look after him. And he always did look after him. He was very fond of building. The owner of a small house with a small garden in the Rue Ste-Anne, he became deeply attached to it for two reasons; first, because it was the fruit of his own labours; secondly, because he could always be altering and adding to it. To add a wing to his study, to build a small summer-house, to have another story put on were so many sources of gratification to him. What induced him to do all this? The wish to embellish his dwelling and to make it more comfortable? Without a doubt, but it was above all the delight of providing work, of seeing people at work. What he liked most in all these operations, were the workmen themselves. No sooner were the masons, upholsterers, carpenters and painters in the place than he went to talk to them; he sent them wine, inquired after their health, their wives and children. The reader may imagine to himself Don Juan chatting to M. Dimanche, but Don Juan in a sincere and sympathetic mood, watching for an opportunity to pay M. Dimanche the money he does not

owe him.* No doubt, his curiosity as a dramatic author prompted to a certain degree his interest in workmen. He made them talk to see and hear how they did talk ; he endeavoured to 'get at' their sentiments, their habits, in order to introduce into his pieces their unvarnished expressions, their peculiarities sketched from life ; but he undoubtedly paid them author's fees, for the conversation always wound up with a present or with some sterling piece of advice.

Another delightful trait of this fascinating character was that he allowed his imagination full play in everything and everywhere. The most commonplace acts of life, the simplest events transformed themselves to him into scenes and dialogues which in their turn became realities by the process of passing through his brain. He believed in everything his imagination conjured up to him. 'Did I tell you what happened to me the other day in the Louvre?' he asked me one morning the moment I entered his room. 'No, you did not tell me.' 'It was one Monday morning, when, as you know, the general public is not admitted. The curator, with whom I am on intimate terms, took me to see a picture by one of the great masters, which has only been there a few days. All at once a door is thrown open and I behold—who do you think? King Louis XVIII. He was being wheeled round in a small carriage. Of course I went away as quickly as my legs would carry me, but the aide-de-camp on

* Two characters in Molière's '*Festin de Pierre*.'—TR.

duty who knew me told my name to the King who waved his hand and nodded his head most graciously.' 'I am not surprised,' I replied, taking my departure.

A week afterwards I went to see him again. 'Did I tell you of my meeting and conversation with Louis XVIII in the Louvre?' he asked. 'You told me of your meeting, but not of your conversation,' I answered. 'Well, the latter was short, but none the less interesting. The aide-de-camp having told the King my name, his Majesty beckoned me towards him and made some complimentary remarks with regard to the "Abbé de l'Épée." Knowing his predilection for Horace, I replied with one of his lines which happened to be a delicate allusion to his, the King's, fondness for the liberal arts. He smiled and I with a respectful bow, took my departure.'

A few days later, I found him seated in his study, with a smile on his lips. 'Did I tell you of my conversation with Louis XVIII?' he asked. 'You just mentioned it, and that was all,' I answered. 'Oh, did I, well, we interchanged some very interesting remarks. I set the ball rolling with a quotation from Horace. Of course, one does not get a King to talk to everyday of one's life, and to tell you the truth, the *old liberau* came out rather strong. I adroitly slipped in some truths he is not accustomed to hear. He did not let me have it all my own way, and he answered. I was equally determined and retorted.' Thereupon, he starts telling me a whole dialogue, with replies,

retorts, interruptions, etc. In the midst of it his wife enters the room and stands listening, her ears and mouth wide open with astonishment. At last she exclaims—‘What a man you are to keep things to yourself. You never told me a word of this conversation.’ ‘And for a very good reason,’ he replies, with a burst of laughter, ‘and for a very good reason, seeing that I only thought of it this morning while in bed, and that I arranged the scene just now for Ernest’s benefit.’

There comes a terrible moment in the life of the dramatic author, between the age of fifty and sixty. It is, what for want of a better term I may call, the twilight period of the imagination. The latter has not wholly set, but is setting. That which was light is no longer anything but a gleam. The mind is still sufficiently active to conceive a scene, to compose a dialogue ; but as for inventing a piece, breathing life into it, and working it out in all its details, old age will not allow you to do it ; hence, heartburnings without end. The little strength left is wasted in miscarried attempts, in false starts. Those fragments of talent keep stirring within like parts still endowed with life, endeavouring to reconstitute a whole, and the result is failure. Well, M. Bouilly was sufficiently fortunate to be able to use the remains of his imagination, thanks to one of those chances which only fall to the lot of large-hearted men. He had a daughter of about twelve, bright, intelligent and clever,

but who absolutely declined to learn orthography. He conceived the idea of making her come every morning to his room and to dictate to her a tale which he improvised while dictating, and in which he managed to introduce the principal grammatical difficulties. Then, at the most interesting stage, he suddenly stopped, saying ; ‘ I’ll dictate the end of the story when you bring me the beginning, copied out without a single mistake.’ ‘ The result may easily be guessed ;’ says the reader. The reader would be mistaken, for it is not easy to guess the result. The result was that the father benefited even to a greater extent than the daughter by this ‘ little game.’ For, though the daughter at the end of a twelvemonth found herself orthographically perfect, the father found himself in possession of a dozen charming stories, bearing the stamp of the skilful dramatist, well constructed, every one of them conveying not only valuable lessons in orthography, but an ingenious lesson in morality, skilfully wrapped in an interesting plot. A publisher who had got wind of the thing, insisted upon publishing the volume. It proved an immense success. The first volume created a demand for a second which met with similar favour. After the ‘ *Contes à ma Fille*,’ came the ‘ *Conseils à ma Fille*’ ; after the ‘ *Jeunes Filles*’ the ‘ *Jeunes Femmes*’ ; after the ‘ *Jeunes Femmes*,’ the ‘ *Jeunes Mères*,’ then ‘ *Mères de Famille*,’ and last ‘ *Encouragements de la Jeunesse*,’ the best work of all which was dedi-

cated to young people. Bouilly had opened a new career for himself; the fond father had won a second popularity for the dramatist. People not only called him the children's friend, as Berquin had been called before him, but the family friend. His fame was such as to carry him to the Tuileries. The Duchesse de Berry, vivacious, impulsive, and ever anxious to reconcile the monarchical principle with the new social conditions, conceived the idea of asking the popular story teller to write some tales for her children. As a consequence we find the pupil of Mirabeau, 'the old liberal,' admitted on a familiar footing to the Pavillon Marsan, where he becomes the intimate companion of the royal children in their games and studies, a kind of tutor, in fact, to the little girl who was to become the Duchesse de Parme (Parma) and the little boy whom the world was to know by the title of the Comte de Chambord. To judge by results the pupil could not have benefited much by the lessons, fortunately they were not equally barren as far as the teacher was concerned. First of all he remained utterly independent; secondly his '*Contes aux Enfants de France*' met with considerable success. Everyone at Court bought the book, and in that way M. Bouilly managed to increase his daughter's marriage portion threefold.

All at once, about 1830, misfortunes swooped down on this happy existence like a bird of prey. Three days after she was taken ill, his daughter, who was

married to a barrister of great talent died at the age of thirty-three in her father's arms. The effect of such a blow is easily understood. It went straight to the heart which was struck not once, but twice, for the daughter was not only his child, but the primary cause of his later literary work. He was struck at an age when such wounds are past healing, he was sixty-eight years old. When a man is young, he, perhaps, suffers more intensely, but his vital powers assert their sway in spite of him, his passions, his occupations, his duties contend with his grief. But what did there remain to the septuagenarian? He could no longer fly to his work, for the pen of the story-teller dropped from his hand as the pen of the dramatist had dropped; his life was fast becoming a blank on all sides. Fortunately there is that within us which survives everything, which is mixed up with everything, which stamps our feelings as well as our thoughts, our joys, as well as our sorrows—our character. We not only suffer with our hearts, we also suffer with our character. A happy disposition, however sensitive the heart associated with it, does not suffer in the same way as an unhappy disposition. The celebrated Dr Hahnemann, talking to me one day of the immense part individuality plays in the pathological affections made the profound remark 'There are no such things as maladies, there are only people who are ill.' In a similar sense one may say 'There is no such thing as affliction, there are only afflicted people.' There are

certain temperaments which seem specially created to indulge in sombre, sullen despair. When misfortune overtakes them, they plunge into it up to their necks, nay deeper still, they literally bury themselves in it. Henceforth the earth has nothing to offer them in the shape of consolation, only that which is gone has any value for them. Their soul is filled with a sorrow which like a mortal disease eats into the rest. They cherish a fixed grief as people cherish a fixed idea. They keep staring for ever at the selfsame point and endeavour to pierce the horizon beyond. I have known mothers who were thus mortally wounded. M. Bouilly's nature was different. There was an amount of elasticity in his character, it could boast of certain springs and a faculty of rebound which preserved him from becoming a victim to sullen grief. No doubt, he felt unhappy to a degree, the poor old man. His very body was bent under the blow, his legs almost refused to carry him. It was pitiful to behold the face, shaped as it were, to express nothing but goodwill and joy, twitching with ill-suppressed sobs ; —to see the eyes whence often flowed tears of gentle pity and sympathy, scorched with scalding tears of grief. Well, it is scarcely credible, but it was that very sympathy which first of all came to his aid in his struggle with despair. His affectionate heart stood so sorely in need of 'going out' to some one that he regretted the lost feeling almost as much as the lost being. He had an intense longing to lavish his

paternal love on some one. I may cite two striking proofs of this. On the walls of my study there hangs a portrait of him, with the following lines in his own hand writing.

‘Au fils de mon ami, par qui j’ai retrouvé
L’illusion d’un père, au jeune Legouvé.’

His poor, harrowed soul clung to any and every semblance of the affection that had been taken from him. At that moment there came to Paris a young artist of genius, whom he had known, and shown some kindness to, when she was a child, Maria Malibran. She showed an angelic tenderness and pity for him in his bereavement. At the foot of his bed, in his alcove, he had hung a portrait of his daughter by Robert Lefèvre, so as to enable him to look at it the first thing in the morning. One day, la Malibran came to see him, and not finding him at home, took advantage of his absence to write on the frame—

‘She is not dead, but sleepeth.’

The reader may imagine his emotion when, on his return he beheld—or rather heard the line, for to him it was endowed with speech. It was the sound, the cry of pity of that voice which at the time sent the whole of Paris frantic with delight. The poor old man rushed to her home, flung himself into her arms and bursting into tears, exclaimed—
‘My daughter, my daughter, you have given me back my daughter.’

I need scarcely say that this was merely an illusion which deceived no one, not even himself; a charitable pretence which got the better of his grief for a moment but was powerless to dispel it; the years of darkness were drawing nigh. It was at that period that his happy disposition suggested a new occupation, revealed to him a talent of which, up till then he had been unconscious, restored to him that with which the man of intellect cannot dispense—work; in short, opened up to him a kind of final career, suited to the strength and intellectual wants of his declining years. The talent M. Bouilly gradually discovered within himself was that of the orator; his new occupation, freemasonry. Freemasonry is to some people an object of terror, to others a subject for laughter; to some people a pretext for eating indifferent dinners and making or listening to indifferent speeches, to others an opportunity of doing good. To M. Bouilly it meant the employment of his best natural faculties—first and foremost among them, his sympathy; he found himself suddenly at the head of twenty-five thousand brethren. Then there was his generosity, there was a constant opportunity of giving something; his eloquence came into play also, for there was always an opportunity of saying something. Finally, there was an opportunity of exercising his liberalism, the freemasons being always in the opposition. The first grades in those days were occupied by men of great note, such as

Philippe Dupin, Berville and Mauguin; M. Bouilly had no difficulty in also attaining one of the highest positions. As president of the lodge of 'Les Amis de la Vérité,' and as a superior member of the 'Grand-Orient,' the masonic meetings, the masonic ceremonies, the masonic banquets became so many opportunities for delivering speeches, the preparing of which called forth all his sprightliness as his 'first nights' of old had done. He composed them as he would have composed the scene of a play, with the additional gratification of adorning them with Latin quotations. There was a mania in those days for quotations, texts and mottoes. Scribe did not erect a summer house, a mill, a dairy or a cowhouse on his estate at Séricourt without adorning it with some distich or stanza of his own making. Here is a sweet one, which will afford an idea of the rest.

' Le travail a payé cet asile champêtre ;
Passant, qui que tu sois, je te le dois peut-être.'

There was not a single piece of furniture in M. Bouilly's study that did not have an inscription of some kind. On the plinth of his clock there was a quotation from Virgil, round the cornice of his library, a quotation from Horace; beneath the portrait of Bossuet a line from Tacitus, beneath the bust of Molière a hemistich from Juvenal. He had, moreover, collected in a little note-book a number of maxims, aphorisms, witty or merely profound sayings, drawn from Seneca, Cicero, Quintilian, etc. In

that way he deluded himself into the innocent belief that he was a capital humanist. That was the store whence he drew on masonic speech days ; he called the process 'larding the partridge.'

I feel bound to make a confession. M. Bouilly had insisted upon my joining the sacred battalion, and I was admitted as a 'whelp' (the son of a mason). I had taken an oath on a skull, never to reveal, on the penalty of death, the secrets of the order, and assuredly, never did anyone keep his oath as I kept mine for the simple reason that up till now I have failed to discover of what the secrets consisted. Hence, I was present at several of those banquets, and I must confess that the irreverent gaiety of my score of years got the better of me when I beheld myself with my small 'prentice apron, and my tiny embroidered hammer slung across my chest, when I watched from 'below the salt' those grave men, bedecked with their insignia and their emblems and their ribands of sovereign princes of the Rosicrucians enacting their impersonations in all seriousness. I must confess that at the outset, I could not help smiling at myself and at them. But when M. Bouilly got on his legs and began to speak, the somewhat strange picture vanished as if by magic. I saw him and no one but him. He not only spoke well, but there was much grace and genuine feeling in his words. Furthermore, his speeches were such a success ; he had such a knack of making people unloosen their

pursestrings while diving generously into his own pocket in the cause of charity, that all idea of laughter went very quickly, and no thought remained but that of asking a blessing on that institution which made him forget his own sorrows and brought back to him some of the happiest hours of his youth. And yet, it will scarcely be believed that this well organised brain, this mind generally so free from the petty vanities of the artist gave way for a moment and allowed wounded pride to hasten his end. At the Opéra-Comique, Grétry and Sedaine's 'Richard Cœur de Lion' had been revived with immense success. The revival led to that of 'Les Deux Journées' and M. Bouilly indulged the dream of a similar triumph for Chérubini and for himself. But Chérubini was not a Grétry; his music, too classical and of too recent a date, had not had time to grow young once more. It was not old, it was simply 'oldish.' The success was flattering, but not startling. At the tenth performance, the piece was put in the Sunday programme; it was the first sign of a 'non-success'; the piece was played as a *lever de rideau* at seven o'clock, which was a second symptom of decline; the house was by no means full, a third and perhaps the most severe blow to the author; for the dramatic author, like air, abhors a vacuum. M. Bouilly who had taken a family with which he was on most intimate terms to the theatre, felt struck to the heart. He went out after the first act, saying: 'Those people'—alluding to the theatrical

authorities—‘will be the death of me.’ Mental and moral excitement especially with old folk often induces sudden perspiration which in its turn brings on fatal chills. When he got home, shivering violently, he went to bed, never to rise again from it. But the moment the danger became imminent, he recovered his strength of mind. His three days’ illness were marked by an admirable calm and a smiling serenity. When on the third evening, on leaving him at midnight I asked him how he felt, he answered—‘I feel all right.’ ‘Are you in pain?’ ‘No, not at all.’

At six next morning he was gone. Forty-three years have elapsed since then ; my grief has subsided, but my regret still lasts.

CHAPTER IV

Two Secretaries of the Academy, MM. Andrieux and Villemain.—
The two Ugliest Men in France.—M. Villemain's Appearance.—
His Manners and Wit.—M. Andrieux.—As witty as the other.—
An insight into the Manners of those Days.—M. Andrieux's Lectures at the Collège de France.—His Voice and how he used it.—
His violent hatred of the Romantic School.—An Epigram of Lebrun.—M. Villemain's System of Lecturing.—His Appreciation of Shakespeare.—His Accession to Office.—His Trials.—He resigns.—His hatred of the Second Empire.—A Conversation with Napoléon III.—His Liberalism.

MY success with the prize poem, having, as a matter of course, brought me in contact with all my judges, I had the opportunity of observing and collecting some interesting facts with regard to them. The first two of which I will treat here are very different in character, by no means equal in merit, yet, having many traits in common. I am alluding to M. Andrieux and M. Villemain. Both were 'life-secretaries' of the Academy; both were university professors; both were political personages, both carried their incisive raillery to the verge of sarcasm; both were admirable readers; finally, both were so ugly, that each would have been undoubtedly the ugliest man in Paris, if the other had disappeared. But from these furrowed, grinning,

wrinkled masks there issued so much wit, life and spirit, so much pointed satire 'that the physiognomy prevented people from seeing the face.'

No one could have afforded a better illustration of the difference between the look and the eye than M. Villemain. Of course he had eyes, but I never succeeded in seeing them. They disappeared under a kind of blinking lids, without a single lash, and which became contracted and creased like a purse, the strings of which one pulls tight. The eyeballs were reduced to a mere tiny, black hole. Well, from this narrow orifice, the look flashed forth, piercing and bright, like a ray of light. His personal appearance and his manners presented the same contrast. Nature had shaped him with a pruning hook. A short and massive body, heavy limbs, a round back, 'knobbed' like a bag of walnuts, an utter neglect of dress which had become proverbial. There are few of us—I mean the young men of my time, who do not remember the strip of flannel vest showing beneath the cuff of his coat and the bit of brace peeping from beneath his waistcoat. Well, this same man when addressing a woman was so graceful in his gestures, so elegant in manner, his voice had such a charm, there was such a mixture of courtesy and respect in everything he did and said as to leave no doubt of his familiarity with all the usages of the best and most refined society, in which, in fact, he had lived from his youth. M. Villemain was a living proof that what we call

'manners' are not merely a purely material affair, depending solely on the shape and movements of the body. No, they are determined by a nameless something within us, something innate, they are part of our moral self. The witty sayings of M. Villemain were quoted everywhere, but I never heard anything prettier than his petition to a lady to whom he paid court in a somewhat too pressing manner, for M. Villemain was not only very attentive to the fair sex, but very enterprising. 'You may love me in all security, madame,' he said to her, 'no one will believe it.'

M. Andrieux was not less witty than M. Villemain. At the time I paid him the visit which custom prescribed in the case of a laureate, rumour was very busy with a tragedy of his on the subject of Brutus the Elder, the founder of the Roman Republic, a tragedy which had been prohibited under the Empire, which had been prohibited during the Restoration, and which, it was said, M. de Martignac had at last licensed for performance. As a matter of course, I mentioned M. de Martignac and the subject of Brutus.

'Yes, yes,' he said 'M. de Martignac, the liberal Minister; he sent for me and asked me to read my piece to him. He was most profuse in his compliments. But he has forbidden the piece all the same. He thinks that I did not make Brutus sufficiently *royalistic*.'

No words could adequately reproduce the strident,

biting, insolent little hiss with which he accompanied and prolonged the last syllable of '*royalistic*,' it was a note of Rossini set to a word from Voltaire; M. Andrieux's conversation teemed with sallies of that kind. Some of these were very profound, such as for instance his reply to Napoleon who complained of the resistance of the 'Tribunate.*' 'Sire,' he said, 'one can only lean on a thing that resists.'

Others were matchlessly droll and daring, nay even crude, and I forbear quoting the latter, though one of these saved the situation at a grand dinner party of my mother's and got her out of a great embarrassment.

At that same dinner there occurred a little incident with regard to which I need not preserve such reticence, inasmuch as it will give a fair idea of the manners and customs of those days.

Among the guests was the celebrated Mdlle. Contat, at that time in the full flush of her beauty. The roast had been put on the table and with it the salad. Mdlle. Contat got up in her brilliant dinner dress, her magnificent bust décolletée to a degree and her arms almost bare. Taking the salad bowl she plunges her white hands bravely into the salad which was already seasoned and begins turning it over. There was a unanimous cry of admiration from the guests, who declared that she had never appeared

* The Legislative Assembly established by the Constitution of the year VIII of the First Republic. It consisted of a hundred members and was abolished in 1807.—TR.

to greater advantage in any part and—at the salad as she had turned it—with their fingers. It would be considered disagreeable nowadays: then it was considered good form. I remember, as if it were to-day the old Marquis de Vêrac, who was a model of a perfect gentleman, saying in his bantering tone, ‘Are you really so very dirty then that you dare not take and eat a cutlet with your fingers.’

M. Andrieux, as I have already said, added to the title of secretary of the Academy that of professor of the University. Every Wednesday, at midday, he lectured on moral philosophy at the Collège de France. They were the strangest lectures I ever heard. He did not sit down in his chair, he walked to and fro—I might say limped to and fro. One day when I went there, he happened to be late and began telling us that it was his housekeeper’s fault. She had let the milk for his coffee boil over and been a quarter of an hour in getting a new supply. And forthwith he launches into a hundred details about housekeeping, cookery, the linen press and so forth, the whole sandwiched between pictures of the domestic virtues in the style of Xenophon’s ‘Economics.’ Then we had a long dissertation on his cat, from his cat, he gradually drifted to Aristotle, and from Aristotle to natural history. Facts led to reflections, they in their turn led to stories and anecdotes, and the stories and anecdotes were simply delightful. One might have been listening

to and watching that charming little Abbé Galiani, concerning whom Diderot tells us so many wonderful things. Like the Abbé, Andrieux enacted all his personages; like the Abbé, he as it were 'staged' his tales; like the Abbé, he emphasised his most pleasant remarks by the most comical grimaces; in short, he amused himself as much as he amused others. On the day in question he told us—I do not remember in connection with what—about that Eastern monarch, who was tired and weary of everything, who was 'used-up' and ill, and whose doctors had recommended him, as a cure for all his ills, to get hold of the shirt of a happy man for his personal wear. Then he gave us a description of the viziers, ministers and sub-ministers sent in quest of that rare creature, 'a happy man.' Every class of the community is thoroughly ransacked in search of 'a happy man'; millionaires, the powerful of the earth, famous men, but all in vain. The envoys of the monarch find the pretence of happiness, but not genuine happiness. There is a skeleton in every cupboard, a canker in every bud, and in connection with this state of universal imperfection, Andrieux treats us here and there to a short moral precept in his own inimitable way. 'At last,' he adds, 'on entering a village one day, the messengers who are at their wit's end, espy a big stalwart young fellow, seated outside the drinking shop. He is singing at the top of his voice, pouring down the liquor as fast as he

can fill his glass, the air resounds with his laughter. "Are you happy?" they ask him. "I," is the answer, "I should think I am. I am as happy as a man can be, absolutely happy." They fling themselves upon him, in the twinkling of an eye, he is surrounded on all sides and stripped. But oh, the pity of it, *this happy man* had no shirt.' At the last words, Andrieux starts into a long, loud, ringing burst of laughter which carries everything before him, for we all follow suit. I feel sure that the Collège de France had never rung with such laughter before. Of course, all this was neither very elevated nor very lofty in sentiment; and the difference between such lectures and those of Michelet and Quinet was a vast one; nevertheless the gossip and 'anecdote-mongering' contained so much sense, so much wholesome, practical, just and cheerful teaching as to leave the most pleasant and useful recollections. And the end of the lecture fitly completed the beginning and the middle. The end was a fable of La Fontaine's or a passage from Boileau—by preference from his 'Lutrin' read aloud. I have heard a number of great readers in my time, but never met with M. Andrieux's equal, for he read admirably without possessing a particle of *voice*. I can find no better comparison for the sound that issued from his mouth than that produced by what we call a *pratique*.* It

* The *siffle-pratique* is the little instrument used by the showman when 'Mr Punch' holds the stage.—TR.

was in turns a screech and a hoarse whisper, it became strident or muffled at will, but the effect produced was simply marvellous. How was it done? By accent, articulation, expression, in short, by the spirit of the thing. One day, at a public meeting of the Academy, he was reading a satire on wayward (rather than unhinged) minds, and portraying them with one line, exclaimed :—

‘Au char de la raison attelés . . . par derrière ’
(‘To logic’s chariot yoked . . . but behind!’)

Whence did he get the strange note he placed on the last word and on the final syllable of ‘behind.’ I cannot say, all I know is that the whole of the house burst into loud applause. This sketch would be incomplete without a few words on his literary doctrine. Of all the classical reactionaries, he was the most uncompromising, the most intense, the most violent. With him there was no salvation even for Lamartine. M. Patin* told me more than once how one day, he found him striding up and down his study with a volume of ‘Méditations’ in his hand. He was interpellating Lamartine and abusing him with all his might. ‘You whimpering cur. You are whining because you are consumptive. What is that to me? You call yourself the dying poet: the dying poet indeed! Well, die, it’s the best thing you can do, you brute. You will not be the first, nor the last;’ etc., etc.

* Another Secretary of the Academy, best known by his ‘Essays’ on the Greek dramatists.—TR.

Who, after this, would believe that the utterer of rank blasphemy against poetry proved himself a poet now and then, and that if his name survive at all, it will be as a poet. Échouard Lebrun who in his day was called Lebrun-Pindar, composed the following pretty epigram on Andrieux :

‘ Dans ses contes, pleins de bon mots,
Qu’Andrieux lestement compose,
La rime vient mal à propos
Gâter les charmes de la prose.’

Échouard Lebrun would have been vastly surprised if someone had told him that that poet ‘whom he so cavalierly warned off the premises’ would leave behind him at least one masterpiece, and that he Lebrun would leave nothing at all. That masterpiece is ‘Le Meunier de Sans-Souci.’ It breathes both the spirit of Voltaire and the frank, joyous good humour of La Fontaine. The young fellows who were before us knew it by heart ; we learnt it like they, and our children will repeat it as we did. Its hundred and twenty lines have secured to Andrieux two hundred years of immortality.

II

Let us change the scene, let us change the professor’s chair, let us change the professor himself. Instead of going to the small theatre of the Collège de France, barely capable of holding three hundred people, let us go to the amphitheatre of the Sorbonne which will hold two thousand, and instead of listening

to the witty gossip of the Place Cambrai, let us look at M. Villemain, the great critic and the great professor.

The new school of criticism is one of the most glorious institutions of our epoch. If the nineteenth century holds its own with the two grand centuries that preceded it, it is because it surpassed the latter in three branches of literature—lyrical poetry, history and criticism. Well, there is no doubt that the higher criticism owes its start to M. Villemain; it was he who enunciated the maxim—‘Literature expresses the tendencies of society’; it was he who in defence of his innovations had recourse to two weapons equally powerful, the pen and the word. He was a charming writer and a marvellous professor. Let us follow him to the Sorbonne.

It was a memorable period—one might almost say, era—in the history of the Sorbonne when Guizot, Cousin and Villemain occupied three of its chairs. Which of these three stood in front of the others? Not one. They were equal to one another because they were unlike one another. M. Guizot was undoubtedly the best of the three, from a *pedagogic* ‘tutorial’ point of view; his vast historical knowledge, accentuated by his rare gift of generalisation, and his somewhat dogmatic tone imparted to his lectures an earnestness still further enhanced by his splendid, earnest voice. M. Cousin had more natural sprightliness, more passion, more imagination and was,

strange to say, at the same time more artificial. One felt rather than saw the comedian in every one of his gestures, in every one of his attitudes. He was both very spontaneous and very cautious at the same time. The lurid gleam of his eyes, the black unkempt hair, the sharply defined features, the lantern-jawed face gave him an inspired look of which he was fully conscious, and of which he availed himself. No one has 'played at improvising' with greater effect than he. Like a great many orators he took care to prepare certain passages beforehand. Nothing was easier than to find out where those passages began. By what sign? By the ease and fluency of his speech? On the contrary, by his hesitations. He pretended to be unable to find the right words. His thoughts seemed to worry him as they were supposed to have worried the oracles of old; one was, as it were, invited to bear witness to, to share in the travail of inward inspiration, there was a kind of crisis as with a woman in the throes of childbirth, and when deliverance came at last like an explosion it struck one all the more forcibly by reason of the suffering and labour undergone in common with the orator. One really fancied having contributed to the result.

The lectures of M. Villemain were by far the most brilliant. To what was this brilliancy due? First of all, to the very subject of his lectures, seeing that literature in itself is always more brilliant than either

history or philosophy ; secondly, to his voice, for I never knew a more magnificent one ; it was a golden voice. Lastly to his talent as a narrator, and what is more rare still, to his talent as a reader.

I hasten to explain. Every professor of literature at a university *should* be an accomplished reader, for quotation is a part of his lecture and to quote means to interrupt one's speech in order to read. As it happens, nothing is more difficult than the 'constant referring to books' while delivering an address. It is an art within an art. An eminent member of the Senate, who is at the same time one of the brightest ornaments of the French bar, told me one day that there are not two in every twenty barristers or political orators who could effectually read a quotation. 'Even those who speak well, read badly,' he added. 'They give you the impression of another man suddenly appearing in the rostrum or at the bar. The speaker to whom you have just been listening spoke in an animated, natural manner, the man who reads the passage meanders along and often strikes a false note. This sudden change not only influences the listener, but the speaker himself ; when he has finished quoting, he does not resume his natural and individual manner ; he has as much difficulty to recover his own animation as to arouse once more the interest of his audience.'

In M. Villemain's case there was nothing of that kind. His quotations, far from interrupting the move-

ment of his own delivery, blended with it, animated and accentuated it. His quotations were part of his eloquence. Was he then like Andrieux, a reader of the first water? No, he lacked an essential quality—naturalness. His diction was more or less stilted. He was as it were ‘making music to himself’ with his own magnificent voice. In this instance, however, the mistake became an advantage. A professor who reads aloud is not only a reader but a critic and commentator. He takes neither the place of the poet nor that of the person to whom he speaks, he plays in his own part in the recital. His voice, his inflections should convey to others his approval, his admiration; the fragment he cites is a lesson he gives; nay, his quotations are often interrupted by short exclamations which are judgments in themselves, he repeats a line over and over again to convey all its beauties to his hearers. M. Villemain excelled in intercalating his own impressions in his quotations; Lamartine’s verse has never sounded more beautiful to me than issuing from his lips, just because he recited while reading it; and, if I may use the term, declamation in this instance was tantamount to acclamation.

M. Villemain’s success was due to a still more intimate cause. It sprang from a deep-seated, powerful passion—the more powerful from its being his only one—the passion for literary beauty; I repeat, literary, for that is the distinctive trait in that eminent man’s character. Montaigne would have called him

‘a bookish man’ (un homme *livresque*).^{*} No art, save that of poetry and eloquence had any existence for him. He knew nothing of music, he had no taste for pictures, his shortsightedness prevented him from enjoying the beauties of nature, his ungainly shape rendered him unfit for bodily exercise. He only knew of one thing—books, but books meant to him the whole domain of genius. Irrespective of period, country, language or kind, everything that could lay claim to the title of masterpiece belonged by right to him, and when he had the volume in his hands, he read, analysed, interpreted it, and the passion of his words, of his gestures, of his facial expression, was such as to carry you along with him. We came away from his lectures, quivering, in a state of excitement, quivering with the desire to know. ^{*}We were moved less by what he taught us than by that which we longed to learn after we had heard him. He was a great ‘light-kindler’ of the mind.

One lecture has remained particularly vivid in my mind. I should like to convey an idea of it, but alas, the spirit of it evaporates on paper. Never mind, I will try. It happened in the flush of the literary battle when one party insulted Racine and the other called Shakespeare a barbarian. One day M. Villemain boldly selected as a subject for his lecture a comparison between ‘La Mort de César’

^{*} The real rendering seems to me a ‘*bookesque*’ man, but I do not dare coin such a word.—TR.

of Voltaire and the 'Julius Cæsar' of Shakespeare. Three hours before the professor's arrival, the court, as well as the lecture-room, was densely crowded. The two literary schools had simply elected to meet there as on a battlefield. The great trial of 'Poetry *versus* Poetry' had been removed to the Sorbonne, with the most illustrious of all literary judges presiding, and was going to be conducted with absolutely open doors. No wonder that everyone flocked to it. M. Villemain opens the proceedings with 'La Mort de César.' He treads warily but with no lack of dignity, and one cannot help admiring the profound and sympathetic, but withal sober appreciation of the noble beauties of the French work. Due effect is given to both the severe and pathetic character of the tragedy. He reads the somewhat pompous, yet grandiose passages of the first scene, he brings into relief the tragic force of the situation of the third act where Brutus, flinging himself at the feet of Cæsar, whom he knows to be his father, implores the latter to decline the crown, for he knows that if Cæsar accepts, there is an end of him. And after following step by step every phase of the dramatic development, M. Villemain comes to the dénouement, to the address of Cassius to the people and the reply of Anthony.

It is no use denying the beauty of those verses, which may appeal to a different taste than that of our own day, but are, nevertheless, really beautiful.

The effect produced by M. Villemain was very considerable, to the great consternation of the romantics, for the classicists were triumphant and their enthusiastic applause rang again and again, until M. Villemain, holding up his hand to demand silence as it were, said, with a faint smile, which I remember still :—‘Softly, gentlemen, softly ; that which you are applauding in those verses of Voltaire is not the exclusive property of the genius of Voltaire, for that page has been imitated from Shakespeare.’

The effect produced this time was absolutely like that of a theatrical climax. The applause ‘changed hands and sides’ and was accompanied by ironical exclamations and scoffing interruptions, but M. Villemain, like the Neptune of Virgil, stilled the angry waves once more by a motion of his hand, and began to analyse ‘*La Mort de César*,’ with the same tact, the same sobriety of judgment he had already displayed. From the very outset he went straight to the fundamental difference in composition that marks the two works, or rather the two systems—the French system and the English system.

In fact, while Voltaire, influenced by the dramatic canons of the seventeenth century has only looked for the amplification of a dramatic event in the historic event, Shakespeare presents us with a historical picture and a series of characters. M. Villemain taking the principal personages of the English masterpiece one by one, Brutus, Portia, Cassius, etc., showed

them to us as Shakespeare limned then ; not as so many theatrical parts, consistent throughout and all speaking the same noble language, but as living, breathing, complex, inconsistent beings. He read us fragments from the scene between Brutus and Portia; from that between Brutus and his slave, from that between Brutus and Cassius, and when he had strongly impressed those characteristic types upon our mind, he made us follow Shakespeare to the forum, showed us Cæsar's corpse, Cæsar's will, the oratorical duel between Anthony and Brutus, the Senate, the soldiers and the people ; the people who had suddenly become the most important factors in the drama. Oh, for the welcome change. We no longer watched and listened to two advocates supporting the pleas of *guilty* or *not guilty* in a kind of assize court, as in the Cassius and Antony of Voltaire, we had before us the whole of Rome with its population swarming into the streets. We saw the crowd, taking bodily shape and being endowed with life, the crowd tossing about and moaning like the sea in a heavy gale, the crowd becoming indignant and sympathetic in turns, cheering that which but a moment before it had insulted, insulting that which it had but a moment before applauded, wanting to make Brutus king, because he has just laid low a king ; wanting to kill Brutus because he has struck Cæsar. Personally, I know of no scene either in the ancient or modern Greek or French drama to be compared to that terrible,

that astounding exhibition of popular fickleness ; I am equally bound to say that never on any stage have I beheld such an enchanting spectacle as that scene commented upon by such a man, in such a room and before such an audience. It seemed to me that the drama was being played at the selfsame time in the amphitheatre, in the work of the poet, in the head of the professor and in the heart of the public. The impression produced was simply stupendous ; the triumphant victory of Shakespeare impossible to describe in words. The excitement lasted long after the lecture, it was prolonged in the passages, in the courtyard of the Sorbonne, in the streets adjoining it. In the whole of his brilliant professional career, M. Villemain has not had such another day. It was like a preface to Cromwell (Victor Hugo's) enacted by living beings. The reader, however, should not misunderstand me. M. Villemain was not a renegade to the national glory. M. Villemain did not desert what in those days were called the altars of Racine and Corneille. No one has done justice to their genius and interpreted their masterpieces in more intense and enthusiastic terms than he. But in his vast comprehension of everything that was beautiful, he claimed a place for Shakespeare by the side of our great men, as he claimed it for Dante, as he claimed it for Æschylus, as he claimed it for Pitt and Fox by the side of Demosthenes and Cicero, as he claimed it for St Chrysostom and St Basilus by the side

of Pitt and Fox. In poetry, M. Villemain was a polytheist.

This altogether new and individual assumption of arbiter between the two literary systems, between the two schools, M. Villemain kept up outside the lecture room. Every Sunday he gathered round his table at 12 Boulevard Saint-Denis, between fifteen and twenty representatives of both parties, who were not only astonished at finding themselves seated side by side, but more astonished still at finding one another so utterly different from what they imagined. One often detests works because one does not sufficiently know their authors; the man often corrects the impression produced by his works, his conversation completes his writings, and the opponents remain opponents still, but cease to be enemies. In that way, M. Villemain became a charming maker of treaties of literary peace. He took great delight—at times a not altogether benevolent delight—in springing a kind of mine upon his guests. Towards the middle of the evening when his rooms became very full he would select a passage from some modern poet, a ‘Méditation of Lamartine,’ an ‘Ode’ of Hugo, a ‘Poem’ of Vigny, even a few verses by Ste-Beuve and endeavour by dint of art and grace to acclimatise the same to the most refractory academical ears and minds. That was his way of soliciting suffrages for the future candidates for a chair in the Academy. In addition to this, uniformly kind to young beginners

like myself and solicitous for their welfare, he did not scruple to take them to task in a paternal, bantering way if he found them looking somewhat pale. He told them what they ought to read, he did not spare them his ingenious and ever just criticisms. 'I shall have to scold you,' he said to me one day, 'about a passage in your prize-poem.' And forthwith two lines of my poem were dissected. 'The first line is all right, nay clever, the second is common and stilted. It is like an old woman's bonnet put on the head of a young girl. Change it before the poem is read in public.'

His advice was often summed up in a short precept full of wisdom: 'The great secret of all art is not to correct your defects, but to develop your good points. It is the system adopted by all great doctors, they heal the weak organs by strengthening the strong ones. They entrust health with the mission of fighting disease. It is the same in art, it is the mission of life to kill death, the good points should stifle the defects.'

All at once this charming rôle of literary guide to the young is abruptly relinquished. We are in 1830 and the revolution breaks out. A new career opens to M. Villemain; the literary functions have to make room for the political. He leaves the Sorbonne; he vacates his chair. He becomes a deputy, a Councillor of State; he has a peerage conferred upon him, he becomes a minister, in short, he rises and rises. . . . Did

he rise? At that point we are confronted with a very curious psychological fact which is worth studying.

III

M. Villemain's accession to the highest offices of State, his appearance in the political arena seemed the natural consecration of his talent, the fit crowning of his life. Well, it was almost the 'uncrowning' of it. No doubt, his personal position remained throughout very considerable, he remained one of the illustrious men of France. But, in spite of this, he failed to acquire the equivalent of his first brilliant renown. He lost in glory what he gained in honours. He lost in authority what he gained in power. Why was this very eloquent professor never more than a second-rate political orator? Why did this ornament to the university fail to show his brilliant qualities when at the head of the university? What was wanting in him? Did he lack talent, practical sense, a knowledge of affairs or the desire to do well? No; what he did lack was that gift which alone enables us to govern men and to conduct affairs, namely, a strongly defined character, and in that character that which phrenologists call 'combativeness,' the love of fighting. M. Villemain was created to be triumphant, he was not endowed for the struggle. One day, I asked M. Guizot who changed the professor's chair for the political rostrum, who went from the Sorbonne to the Boulevard des Capucines (the Ministry for Foreign

Affairs), with such apparent ease, 'Wherein lies the difference between the professor and the political orator.' 'The difference is this,' he said, 'the professor speaks from a higher intellectual level than that occupied by his listeners, the political orator occupies the same level with his listeners. When the professor takes "his chair" he is confronted by disciples only ; when the orator ascends the rostrum he has only adversaries in front of him. In many instances his very friends enjoy his discomfiture, they laugh at his failures; every speech is virtually a battle to be won. The professor may count upon the support of all, the orator must not count upon anyone except himself.' These words account for M. Villemain's inferiority, even in Parliament. He had to be assured of the sympathy of his audience in order to be himself. Hostility, instead of spurring him on, disconcerted him. This master of banter could not bear being bantered. One day, in the House of Peers he failed when confronted by an unanimous silence. When too violently interrupted, he complained bitterly of not being able to speak. His protest having failed to restore silence, he becomes utterly confused, and after trying in vain to utter a few words of retort, he leaves the tribune, crushed by this ironical display of indifference and with difficulty keeping back his tears.

He shows the same lack of grip as a Minister. Only those are fit for power who enjoy its bitters as well as its sweets, who bend their back to its burdens

as well as lift their heads to its triumphs. It is the spirit of the delightful answer of Dr Véron, when twitted with having sold the *Constitutionnel* too dear. 'And what about the dear worries of which I shall be deprived, what about my dear worries,' he exclaimed. 'Assuredly they ought to be paid for.'

Well, to M. Villemain, the worries of office were so many mortal and incurable pains. He felt crushed beneath his responsibility. He was afraid of everything. The smallest newspaper article upset or terrified him. I had a remarkable proof of this. One of my dearest friends, Goubaux, the principal of the Saint-Victor Institution for Boys, which has since then become the College Chaptal, had just decided to abandon the system of university education and to inaugurate in France the system of professional education. He was very anxious to substitute the title of 'College' for that of 'Institution' at his establishment, but the authority of the Minister was indispensable. Being aware of the friendly footing on which I was with M. Villemain, he begged me to go and ask him the permission to that effect. I went, but no sooner did I open my lips than the man started abusing me. All the convictions and prejudices of the university man rose up in revolt; this new education, this education without Greek and Latin seemed nothing short of sacrilege to him, and he wound up his dithyrambic with the decisive words—'*A French college—never.*' 'A French college in France seems

to me perfectly just,' I replied coolly. At the last words he left off striding up and down the room and turned visibly pale. Then he made for the door in order to bring the interview to an end. 'So you have made up your mind for war,' he said. 'Very well, you write for the *Siècle*; well, the best thing you can do is to "go for me." "Go for me," I tell you.' Therewith he dismisses me.

As a matter of course I went back to Goubaux, considerably cast down and told him the untoward result of my mission. Next morning at ten o'clock he received from the Minister the authorisation to change the title of the Saint-Victor Boarding-School to that of 'Collège François I.' M. Villemain had reversed his decision in fear of an article which it need hardly be said I would never have written.

It was about the same time that the encroachments of the Jesuits caused that general 'hubbub' and alarm whence sprang, as if by a kind of magic summons, the diabolical and terrible personage of Rodin, of 'The Wandering Jew' of Eugène Sue. Harassed by the general excitement, M. Villemain was seized with a strange terror, an invincible terror of the Jesuits. His mind beheld them everywhere. He felt sure that he was the object of their persecutions. If a paper happened to be mislaid in his study, the Jesuits had purloined it in order to use it as a weapon against him. The office porters, the employés, nay, the very heads of departments, seemed to him so many spies

placed there as a watch upon his doings by the Jesuits. His manner became such as to attract the notice of Louis-Philippe himself. 'My dear M. Guizot,' he said one day at the termination of a ministerial council, 'I verily believe that your Minister of public education is going out of his mind.'

IV

After that, M. Villemain's resignation became a matter of course, and in a very short time he made up his mind to that effect. As his intellect was in no way impaired a few weeks sufficed to restore him to his work, his practical sense and his literary and professional success; his character, however, never recovered from the shock. Henceforth he was suspicious and sensitive to a degree, he lost confidence in his very friends. One morning I called upon him. 'What is it you want?' he asked abruptly. 'I want nothing, I merely came to see you.' 'I understand,' he remarked, bitterly. 'You no longer believe in my friendship for you, you feel reluctant to ask me a favour.'

Such was the man, and as time went on he became more and more depressed and misanthropic, when all at once, at past sixty he blossomed afresh into life, youth and cheerfulness. I have rarely met with a more extraordinary fact. At the shock of a great political event, and prompted by altogether new feelings, the Villemain of formerly reappeared with all his old animation and brilliancy. The event

that caused the change was the Coup d'État of '51. The feeling was that of indignation. The Second Empire inspired him with relentless horror. Those massacres in the streets, that wholesale transportation, that suppression of liberty, that spoliation of the Orleans family, that crushing of the middle classes, that triumph of the sword, that contempt for literature wounded him in his inmost and deeply-rooted feelings and convictions; and his sarcasms, his indignant sneers against that new Cæsar and that new Court knew no ebb. The flame of that hatred rekindled every feeling of his youth. He fell in love once more, the poetry within him was stirred afresh. When I went to see him he told me of his altogether ideal passions, he showed me his verses. The demon of work having got hold of him again at the same time, he wrote his last book 'Pindare,' which is one of his best. I am unable to say whether, as the great Greek scholars contend, his knowledge of that language displayed in it, is not sufficiently thorough, but this I do know, that M. Villemain proved himself to be possessed of the best gifts the genius of the Athenians had to bestow; gracefulness and spirit. In order to finish his work as soon as possible he rose before dawn and by way of 'getting his hand in,' he began by writing verses. I fancy I can hear him now exclaim, as he did one morning the moment I entered his room:—

'Quatre heures du matin ! . . . Allons ! debout, vieillard !'

‘This is the first line I have written this morning.’ And forthwith he recited to me a whole piece of poetry, replete with lofty thought and genuine eloquence.

This was too good to last. For a time M. Villemain was buoyed by the hope of seeing the Empire fall as it had risen, but when it became evident that the régime would be prolonged, his ardour fell, leaving nothing behind but his aversion. An accident provided him with the opportunity of showing it at the Tuileries itself. It was in the spring of 1859, a little while before the Franco-Austrian campaign. M. de Laprade, elected a member of the Academy towards the end of 1858 had been officially ‘admitted’ on the 7th March 1859. According to custom, the life-secretary had requested an audience of the Emperor, in order to present to him the new academician, who was to hand the sovereign a copy of his speech bound and wrapt in a beautiful sheet of gilt paper. The interview had been fixed for eleven, and in due time we four, M. Flourens, the Director, I, the Chancellor, M. Villemain, the Secretary and M. de Laprade with his beautifully bound speech, start in the academical state carriage for the Château. We are conducted to a drawing-room adjoining the reception chamber and told that the Emperor will receive us in a very little while. A quarter of an hour goes by, but there is no sign of the Emperor; half-an-hour, three-quarters of an hour elapse and still

no Emperor. M. Villemain fuming with rage was striding up and down the room, pouring forth abuse by the yard and threatening to go. M. Flourens, who had prepared a little complimentary speech into which he had adroitly slipped a trifling petition, did his utmost to pacify and detain him. Laprade did not say a word, and as for myself, though my feelings were entirely on M. Villemain's side, I joined M. Flourens, less, I admit, out of respect for the dignity of the sovereign, than from a spirit of curiosity. The Emperor, even according to his enemies, was a thorough gentleman; people said that he not only considered himself, but that he was justified in considering himself one of the best bred men of his empire. Hence, I was cudgelling my brain in trying to find out the reason for this gratuitous impoliteness to one of the foremost institutions of the State, when the door was flung open at last and the sovereign advanced towards us, the body as usual trying to steady itself on the hips, and with that faint smile in his eyes and on his lips, which seemed never to get beyond the incipient stage. I don't know whether he felt uncomfortable at having kept us waiting, but he certainly looked uncomfortable. He apparently felt at a loss what to say to us, and M. Flourens himself was obliged to break the silence which was becoming rather awkward. 'May I have the honour to present to your Majesty our new colleague, M. de Laprade.' 'M. de Laprade? Oh, that's right,' replied the

Emperor, then turning to Laprade in the most gracious manner, he added—‘When is the Academy to have the pleasure of your speech, monsieur?’ Thoroughly astounded we hung our heads, but Villemain in an indescribable tone of banter and with a very low bow, replied: ‘Will your Majesty allow me to point out that M. de Laprade was admitted a week ago and that we are here to hand this speech to your Majesty.’ ‘Oh, very well,’ observed the Emperor without wincing; ‘I’ll have great pleasure in reading it.’ Then he went on in the same placid tone. ‘Is there another vacancy?’ ‘Yes, sire, that of M. Brifaut’s.’ ‘M. Brifaut was a talented man, was he not?’ ‘We are all talented men, sire,’ replied Villemain, with another low bow. M. Flourens seized the opportunity of making his flattering and somewhat interested little speech, which the Emperor acknowledged in a kindly, absentminded way proving clearly that he had really not heard a single word of it, and after a few more insignificant remarks, he dismissed us with a most gracious wave of his hand.

Before we had fairly settled down on our return journey, Villemain burst into sardonic, triumphant laughter, ‘chaffing’ M. Flourens and thoroughly consoled for the impoliteness of the ‘ill-bred creature’ by the ‘blunder’ of the ‘bungler.’

A few days later the papers gave us the key to the enigma. At the selfsame hour that we were waiting

for the Emperor, he was engaged with M. de Cavour ; and in that interview the war with Austria was decided upon. Candidly speaking, he had the right to be unpunctual and absent-minded.

V

The remainder of my notes about M. Villemain are as painful as they are pathetic.

M. Villemain was what the English call *a domestic man* ; the love of home and family had almost become a religion with him. As a youth and as a man he had worshipped his mother, a clever, warm-hearted woman, very proud of her son, very jealous of him, in fact, so frantically jealous as to have prevented him contracting a very advantageous marriage because she considered her son too violently in love with his betrothed. Well, M. Villemain, notwithstanding his poignant regret treated this cruel mother with an amount of respect, tenderness and deference, rarely to be met with in men occupying so exalted a public position. Having married subsequently a sweet tempered young woman, by whom he had three daughters, he was beginning to enjoy the welcome rest after his many tribulations, amidst the peaceful and affectionate surroundings, so eminently suited to his loving disposition and far from determined character, when all of a sudden he was struck to the very heart, mortally struck, by a catastrophe which might truly be termed tragical.

The terrible fate from which he had but barely escaped swooped down like a thunderbolt upon his family: his wife went out of her mind. At first, in the hope of a speedy cure, he tried to keep her at home, and in order to hide the terrible secret from the world, the poor woman took her place at the official receptions at the Institute dressed as usual. She was brought down to the drawing-room and surrounded by her most intimate friends, seated at a work-table; but in a little while a nervous and strident laughter constantly issuing from the same corner disclosed the anxiously concealed truth. The separation became inevitable, but to lose the mother meant to lose the children at the same time, for they were too young to remain with him. He was obliged to send them to a convent, and the poor man remained alone in that same apartment, between those two spectres as it were, between those two cases of madness, that of his wife which was beyond cure, and that of his own which might reassert itself at any moment. After a while, unable to bear this solitude, he endeavoured to reconstitute his family by sending for his daughters, for whom he engaged a governess, a lady of English origin who had just relinquished a similar position in the family of the Duc d'Harcourt.

This lady was so phenomenally ugly as to draw from M. Villemain, the ironical and still somewhat peevish remark: 'I fancy that I may safely show her to both

my friends and my enemies.' 'Especially to your enemies,' replied M. Viguier. Considering that she virtually enacted the hostess in the drawing-room of a life-secretary of the Academy, the lady's French was somewhat original. Referring one evening to a certain young man, and wishing to convey that he made eyes at her young pupils, she used the word *oeillettes* instead of *willades*; and a little while afterwards spoke of a beautiful piece of fruit as being in full *mûrisson* instead of being in full *maturité*. M. Villemain having timidly suggested the right words, the lady replied sharply and with a kind of lofty contempt; 'I do not know what people say at the Academy, but at the Duc d'Harcourt's, people used the words *oeillettes* and *mûrisson*.'

The governess's sayings became one of the rare amusements of the family. Fortunately the comfort emanating from a higher source was not wanting. The eldest of the girls was a person of rare distinction and intellect, and of a noble disposition. Though still very young, she was barely eighteen, she raised herself without an effort to that charming typical character, more frequently met with in large families than is generally supposed, that of 'sister-mother' as Dickens would have said. She had many offers of marriage but refused them all. 'My life does not lie in that direction,' she answered. 'I have three duties to fulfil; I must get my sisters married; remain with my

father, and if I had the misfortune to lose him, shut myself up with my mother to take care of her. She literally carried out her admirable programme; superintending everything, proving equal to everything, taking a share in her father's work, spending half a day each week with her mother, who, curiously enough became calm in her presence, and in her presence only. She succeeded in marrying her two sisters to men thoroughly worthy of them. The joy at that success was not altogether unalloyed; for the sisters left the home, left Paris. Middle. Caroline, in order to fill the void caused by these two departures, watched more affectionately still over her father; she copied his manuscripts, translated passages from his favourite English authors; in short, became to him three daughters in one; and he, comforted by, and grateful for so much loving care, worshipping her as one worships one's child, and showing her the pious reverence one shows one's mother, was gradually recovering a somewhat melancholy tranquillity which was almost happiness, when a new catastrophe descended on that ill-fated home. One of the two young women was struck down like the mother, and one may picture to one's self that father and daughter facing one another in that desolate apartment, cowering under the misfortune which was virtually a threatening warning, each trembling for the mental safety of the other and perhaps for his or her own. It was positively heart-rending. I never entered their presence without being

reminded in some way of 'Hamlet' or 'Lear.' Having become the academical colleague of M. Villemain, I often went to see him, impelled by deep commiseration; I went to chat with him about the happy times when I was one of his pupils. The retrospect of those halcyon days had the effect of restoring a certain cheerfulness, he smiled now and then when I told him of my youthful enthusiasm for him, of the passionate love of literature he instilled in our hearts, and both of us felt almost young again when talking about that period of 1830 of which he was one of the most brilliant representatives and which has left such indelible recollections. For, let it be remembered that 1830 is more than a mere historical date in the nineteenth century, it is a moral date. The men of 1830 are marked with a particular stamp like the men of 1789. They possessed the same fund of genuine enthusiasm, of generous and often fertile illusions; our hearts were filled with the love for everything that is noble, and the whole of those times may be summed up in one adjective—*liberal*. Libéral; it is one of the loftiest words in the French language, seeing that it means both generosity and liberty

CHAPTER V

M. Legouvé's Father.—His Son begins to doubt his Talent.—In order to arrive at an unbiassed opinion, he studies his Principal Works.—‘*La mort de Henri IV.*’—Objection to the subject from the classical view.—The Author objects to be bound by such views.—He writes his Play in Six Months.—The Censorship refuses to licence it.—The Ministers put a veto on it.—M. Legouvé's Mother.—Her Stratagem.—The rumour of the beauties of the Play reach Napoleon's ear.—The Author sent for.—A Reading at Saint-Cloud.—Napoleon's pity for Henri IV.—His only Criticism on the Play.—The *Première*.—Talma as Henri IV.—Mdlle. Duchesnois as Marie de Medicis.—The beginnings of Mdlle. Duchesnois.—Her *Début*.—The Public divided into two Camps.—Mdlle. Duchesnois' ‘*Bulls.*’—Mdlle. Duchesnois' criticism on Talma.

NEVERTHELESS, the literary men of 1830 were not always very generous in their appreciation of their predecessors, and Corneille, Bossuet, Racine were often sneered at, while those who had succeeded them, Arnault, Lemercier and M. Legouvé's father were treated with even greater contempt. The author of these recollections was struck in his most cherished affections, the filial pride in the literary achievements of his sire. He suffered cruelly, the more so as he himself was not far from sharing the convictions of his contemporaries, at any rate with regard to some of the writers who had gone before. Under those

circumstances he resolved to re-read critically the four principal works of his father, and to arrive at a judgment, unbiassed by the ties of blood. These works were 'Le Mérite des Femmes,' a short poem; 'La Mort d'Abel,' 'Epicharis et Néron,' and 'La Mort de Henri IV,' three tragedies. His notes on the last work will prove the most interesting to the general reader.

[NOTE OF TRANSLATOR AND EDITOR]

* * * * *

The representation of 'La Mort de Henri IV,' proved almost a literary and political event. When my father told his friends of his intention to write a tragedy on the subject of the death of Henri IV, he was met with a shout of derision. 'You are surely not in earnest. The subject of a tragedy should be at least seven or eight hundred years old. We can understand your choice of the death of Abel, that goes back sufficiently far. Remember Racine's preface to 'Bajazet.' He only ventured to treat a contemporary subject because the subject was a distant one as regards space. The subject was of recent date, but its scene was a thousand leagues away. Space was replaced by time. But to represent in the Paris of 1806 a tragedy in five acts and in verse, which had been enacted in prose and in real life in the Paris of 1610—after a lapse of scarcely two centuries; it is more than absurd, it is downright irreverent. You are degrading Melpomene. And besides, what a hero

of tragedy, a hero who swears. A hero who says "Ventre Saint-Gris," a hero who talks of a fowl in the pot. We defy you to quote that historical saying, at any rate.'

'Well, I accept the challenge,' answered my father. 'And I'll put Henri IV on the stage, and better still, I'll make the public applaud "the fowl in the pot." And from this moment you may consider yourself invited to hear me read my piece.'

Six months afterwards the piece was ready; unfortunately there arose a more formidable obstacle. At the preliminary announcement of the piece, the official world had become greatly excited. This apotheosis of a king, of a Bourbon, produced a kind of revolt in every official's breast, great and small. They considered it an insult to the glory of the Emperor. The censorship prohibit the play, the Ministers, on being consulted, add a veto expressive of their indignation. The work was virtually strangled at its birth. Fortunately by my father's side stood a clever, distinguished, plucky woman, who swore by all her gods that the piece should be played, and played at the Théâtre-Français, and played by command of the Emperor. That woman was his wife. How did she manage it? Very simply indeed. My father was a very clever reader; she made him read his tragedy three times before such powerful and numerous audiences that the rumour of its success spread as far as Saint-Cloud, and one morning while they were at breakfast, the

courtyard of my father's house, in which house I still live, rang with the neighing of a horse and the voice of its rider. It was an orderly from the Emperor. My father was commanded to appear next day at ten at the Château de Saint-Cloud to read to the sovereign his tragedy on the 'Death of Henri IV. Though fully confident of his own powers as a reader, he took with him Talma whom he asked to read in his stead. He wanted to have both his eyes and ears disengaged in order to watch his Imperial spectator.

The Emperor was waiting for him in a small drawing-room in company of Empress Joséphine and two generals.

During the reading the Emperor got up very frequently, walking up and down the room and testifying his approval by nods and signs. Every now and then he exclaimed, 'Poor fellow, poor fellow.' Only one line elicited an objection on his part. In a scene with Sully, Henri IV exclaimed—'I am trembling' (with fear). 'It is impossible to leave that line in, Monsieur Legouvé,' said the Emperor in an animated tone. 'It must be taken out.'

'Sire,' replied the poet, 'Henri IV's fears are a matter of history.'

'That may be. The line must be taken out. *A sovereign may be afraid; he must never say so.*'

This was the only alteration asked for by the Emperor, who roundly took the censorship to task, the veto was removed, the play restored to the

comedians, and the night of its first performance looked not unlike the eve of a riot. An immense crowd blocked up all the approaches to the theatre from four in the afternoon. Nothing less than a royalist demonstration was expected. The whole of the Paris police was ordered out. The Ministers openly blamed the Emperor for being *too liberal*. The event proved once more that liberty is by no means a bad counsellor. There was no noise except frantic applause, and the actors, wound up by feverish expectation and startling success 'surpassed themselves.'

In those days there was a strictly defined rule with regard to an actor's 'line of business,' and the 'casting' of the piece had been productive of some difficulties. Talma had expressed to my father his great desire to play Henri IV, but the theatrical authorities objected that the odious and sombre personages belonged by right to Talma. 'That's just why I wish to play this part. I have enacted the human monster long enough. I want to enact a kindly creature. I'll play the part all the better for having been used to the others, and I'll come back to the others all the better for having played that one. In our art the first and foremost condition of progress is to gather new experience. To confine one's self to one line of characters is to condemn one's self to exaggeration and mannerism. My dear Legouv  , you may safely trust your N  ro to give a good

account of Henri IV. Events proved the justice of his argument. In more than one instance he corrected the somewhat too elegant style of the piece by his unaffected tone and natural grace of motion. I have often been told of the touching pathos of his voice in the beautiful scene when Henri IV has a foreboding of being killed :

‘ Il est, il est des jours de sinistre présage
Où l’homme dans son cœur cherche en vain son courage !
Ils me tueront, Sully ! ’

Lafon saved the difficult character of d’Epernon by sheer nobleness of mien and manner ; Damas brought the incisive brusqueness of his talent to bear upon the rôle of Sully ; as for Marie de Médicis it belonged by right to Mdlle. Duchesnois, my father’s pupil.

This Mdlle. Duchesnois was indeed a strange artist and well worthy of a moment’s consideration. My father had consented to give her lessons, at the particular instance of M. Chaptal, the Minister of the Interior. One morning there entered his room a tall girl, ugly enough to frighten him out of his wits ; with a mouth stretching from ear to ear, lean, with a sallow skin and shivering with cold ; for it was in December, and her whole wardrobe seemed to consist of a cotton frock, showing the outlines of her angular body.

‘ You are Mdlle. Duchesnois ? ’ asked my father.

‘ Yes, monsieur. ’

‘ Of whom M. le Ministre de l’Interieur has told me ? ’

‘Yes, monsieur.’

‘My dear child, who gave you the idea of playing tragedy?’

‘Myself, monsieur. My father keeps an inn at Valenciennes. A company of actors gave some performances in our town. I went to see them. They played a tragedy entitled “Phèdre,” and from that day I made up my mind to be a tragic actress and nothing else.’

‘Do you know any passages from “Phèdre”?’

‘I know every line of it, monsieur.’

‘Well, just recite to me the great scene from the third act with Œnone.’

At the twentieth line, my father held up his hand. ‘That will do, mademoiselle. I shall expect you to come here every day at twelve, and I’ll set you to work.’

What had my father found in her to compensate for the many physical drawbacks? Her voice, an admirable, bell-like, full and rich voice; a voice which had so much emotion in it naturally, that the owner of it might have safely done without any at all. A few months later, the bills of the Théâtre-Français displayed the following announcement:—‘Début of Mdlle. Duchesnois, pupil of M. Legouvé.’ A member of the Académie - Française, a favourite dramatic author had consented to figure on a play bill as a teacher of elocution to a tragic actress. The tragic actress did credit to her teacher. Her success amounted to a veritable triumph, and a triumph all

the more glorious, seeing that her rival in the great tragic parts was a young girl, handsome to a degree, and whose début had been hailed with the greatest enthusiasm. I am alluding to Mdlle. Georges. Mdlle. Georges was, moreover, the *protégée*, not of a simple Minister but of the supreme master. It was even said—I had the story from M. Brifaut, who was well posted in all the doings of those days—that after her début, she attracted the notice of the imperial spectator to such an extent that the latter had her instructed in many things as M. Chaptal had Mdlle. Duchesnois instructed in elocution ; which shows that the question of education was by no means neglected under the imperial government.

The day of Mdlle. Duchesnois' first appearance was a day of battle. Challenges were freely given and accepted in the orchestra stalls. The house was divided into two camps, the partisans of the ugly girl against those of the handsome girl. Most wonderful to relate, it was the ugly girl who remained the victor. At the same time, it is but fair to add that she set foot 'on the boards' completely transformed. The poor girl's leanness and sallow skin were due to want of food. Six months of proper nourishment had developed her magnificent figure and given her the air of a goddess walking on the clouds. The wonderful eyes made up for the horrible mouth. Truly, she had not a scrap of education, but the fiery soul, the headlong passion stood her instead of everything. At the same

time one feels bound to admit that her ignorance was almost too dense to be believed. It was she, who having heard one of her fellow-actresses talk of her journey to Troyes (in Champagne) remarked in an animated tone—‘Troie (Troy). You have been to Troie. How you must have enjoyed your stay there. I, who am always talking about it in all my parts, I have never been there.’*

One evening, after a performance of ‘Bajazet’ she wanted to know what those *mutes* were of which she was always talking. On another occasion at a dinner at my father’s, she sat for a while lost in thought, then all at once exclaimed—

‘That poor Henri IV, Monsieur Legouv  , to think that if Ravaillac had not killed him, he would perhaps be alive now.’

Of course, everybody burst out laughing, which did not prevent her from carrying the house with her whenever she played the part of Maria de M  dicis. It merely shows that in the dramatic profession, and side by side with finished artists like Talma who owe their genius to a happy union of inspiration and careful reflexion, there are actors by temperament. The mere contact with the boards, the glare of the foot-lights, the sight of the public, carries them beyond themselves and lifts them into the highest regions of art. Their defects count as nought, the fact of their possessing artistic qualities which make the public

* The sound of the two words in French is absolutely alike.—TR.

forget those defects is all sufficient. Such an artist was Mdlle. Duchesnois. She intoned rather than spoke her lines, she 'psalmodised,' she had a tragical hiccup which has become proverbial in connection with her name, and of which my father could never cure her. It did not matter a jot, for no sooner did she set her foot on the boards than a kind of unconscious, fiery passion took possession of her, which communicated itself to the public like a train of gunpowder. No one ever played, no one will ever play the third act of 'Marie Stuart' as she did. When she emerged from her prison, bewildered, intoxicated with joy, her arms held out at full length, the eyes flooded as it were by the light of heaven, and her voice falling upon the air like the chink of gold, she gave one the impression of wanting to clasp everything to her bosom, trees, clouds, nay, the very sun himself.

To conclude. One day we were talking about Talma. 'He is more sublime than ever, is he not?' I said. 'You who have been acting with him for such a long while must have noticed that he goes on improving.'

'Yes,' she answered, 'he is more complete, more finished if you like; but in the fourth act of 'Hamlet,' I mean in the scene with his mother, *he does not frighten me as much as he used to do.*'

Which proves that with purely instinctive natures mere feeling often reaches a depth of subtle criticism denied to others.

CHAPTER VI

M. Legouv  s taste for Music.—His Grandparents' Opposition to it and their Reason.—He prevails upon them to give him a Music Master.—La Malibran's First Appearance in Paris.—M. Legouv  s Introduction to her.—Mme. Malibran tells him he has a good Voice.—The real Maria Malibran.—Her Struggles with her Voice.—Her Father.—An Anecdote about Adolphe Nourrit.—Her First Appearance in New York.—The Woman and the Artist but one.—Her Wit and Appreciation of other Artists.—La Malibran as an Actress.—An Anecdote about Rubini.—La Malibran in Rome.—Her Fits of Melancholy Depression.—She sings 'Casta Diva' on the spur of the moment.—Her Marriage with M. B  riot.—Her artistic Duel with Thalberg.—Her Death.—Postscriptum.

I

MAN is often endowed with certain capacities and tastes the possession of which he scarcely suspects until they are revealed to him by what, for want of a better term, I must call initiators. Such were to me two great artists who stirred within me the holy and ardent passion for music dormant there. I am alluding to Maria Malibran, and Hector Berlioz. The close ties of friendship which bound me to both, will enable me to add a few accurate and novel traits to these two figures, one of which already constitutes a mere 'reminiscence,' while the other is fast entering the domain of legend.

My taste for music revealed itself rather late, it having been almost stifled at its birth by a family superstition. My father's memory and name were, as I have said before, the objects of a worship easily understood. My greatest ambition was to be like him, and my grandparents carefully nursed that reverent wish. It so happened that my father did not care for music, and had no ear for it; consequently when, while I was still at college, I suggested that I should learn to read at sight, I was told that it was altogether useless, seeing that 'your father sang terribly out of tune.'

As a matter of course, I stifled my wish, not thinking myself justified in liking that which my father had not liked. Two years later, when I was sixteen, I was taken to the Opéra-Comique where I heard 'Le Prisonnier' by Della-Maria; I was deeply moved by the simple gracefulness of certain songs, and I ventured to say very timidly—

'I fancy I should be very fond of music.'

'Nonsense, nonsense, your father sang horribly out of tune,' was the reply.

Once more the argument seemed to me unanswerable, and my filial reverence suddenly exorcised the irreverent hankering. A twelvemonth later I was taken to 'La Dame Blanche.' The trio of the first act aroused my enthusiasm, and I exclaimed—
'But I am very fond of music.'

‘Nonsense, nonsense, your father hadn’t a scrap of voice.’

‘I don’t know what kind of voice my father had,’ I replied, ‘but I know my own feelings well enough. And I know that I am very fond of music, very fond indeed.’

My people were obliged to indulge this ‘odd fancy’ which went on developing itself gently in the temperate regions of the music proper to light opera, until the day when an unforeseen meeting suddenly changed my fancy into passion, and carried me by force into the higher spheres of art. At the time in question everyone in Paris was talking about the arrival of a young singer, the daughter of the celebrated tenor Garcia, and the wife of an American merchant, Mr Malibran. Public rumour proclaimed her to be a rival to Mme. Pasta. My good luck took me to a charity concert at the Conservatoire on the very day she sang for the first time in Paris. There was an immense crowd, and expectation had reached a high pitch. Seated on the platform amidst the lady performers, the new comer was the object of general curiosity, though there was nothing striking either in her face or figure. In her small, mauve bonnet, which nevertheless hid half of her features she gave one the impression of an English girl who had not long left boarding school. When it is her turn to sing, she rises from her seat, takes off her bonnet and walks to the piano as she is to play her own

accompaniment. But the moment she is seated again there is a gradual transformation.

First of all people are surprised at the simple way she wears her hair ; there are no curls, no cleverly piled up rolls ; simply flat and soft bands, showing the outlines of the head. In addition to this, a somewhat large mouth and a short nose, but such a pretty oval face and such a shapely neck and shoulders that the absence of facial beauty is forgotten in the contemplation of the purity of bodily outline. To complete the whole a pair of eyes, the like of which have not been seen since the days of Talma, eyes which had ‘an atmosphere of their own.’ Virgil said, ‘*Natantia lumina somno.*’ Well, Maria had eyes like Talma’s floating in some indescribable electrical fluid, and the glance of which was both luminous and veiled at the same time, like a sunbeam piercing a cloud. They were dreamy looks full of pathos and passion. She began by singing the ‘Willow Song’ from ‘Otello.’ At the end of a few bars the public virtually surrendered, at the end of the first strophe, they felt intoxicated, at the end of the song itself they were simply frantic. As for myself, I felt like a man in the car of a balloon at the moment they let go the ropes. But a second or two before the balloon was softly swaying hither and thither at a few yards off the ground, and all at once it darts into space like the arrow from the bow. It is the only way I can describe my feelings. Up till then,

music with me, had been a gentle art, graceful and spirited, it now appeared to me as the most pathetic and purest vehicle for interpreting the deepest emotions of love, poesy and grief. A new world has been revealed to me, the world of grand dramatic music. The performances of 'Semiramide,' 'Gazza Ladra' and 'Tancredi' were so many progressive steps in my musical education ; the genius of Rossini and the talent of La Malibran had been my tutors.

I soon advanced another step in that art and it was to La Malibran that I once more owed it. My guardian who was on intimate terms with the family introduced me to her, and in a little while I was one of a number of friends who accompanied her in her rides. One day at Saint-Cloud where we breakfasted I grew impatient at the slowness of the waiters, and shouted : 'Waiter, bring some plates.'

She immediately turned to me and said, 'I say, you have got a baritone voice.'

'What sort of voice is that?'

'A very nice kind of voice, and yours is a particularly good one. In pronouncing the word "plates" you gave a very clear ringing note. If I were you I'd take a master.'

I took two, a teacher of music and a singing master, and that was the starting-point of my direct communion with the masterpieces of the lyrical drama. That was how I changed my rôle of listener into

that of interpreter, how my passion became an occupation and my pleasure a labour of love. That was how I studied in succession 'Otello,' 'Don Juan,' 'Fidelio,' 'Iphigénie en Tauride,' 'Le Mariage Secret,' etc., etc.,* and how at last I. . . . But I have said enough of the man who was being initiated, let us talk of the woman who initiated him.

In the different human tongues there are certain words which seem made up of rays of light, such as youth, love, beauty. In art there are certain names which shine with a similar lustre, such as 'Adrienne Lecouvreur,' 'Mdlle. Rachel,' 'Maria Malibran.' All three died before their time, and this premature end adds to their talent a charm which is more or less felt when such talent is supposed not to have given its full measure, when such an existence is snapped in twain; this premature end established between them a kind of relationship; we like to look upon them as three sisters in fame. In Alfred de Musset, Maria Malibran found a singer worthy of herself. Everyone remembers the stanzas he wrote about her, but do these stanzas say everything there was to be said? By no means. Poetry cannot say everything. Poetry sings, it does not analyse, it immortalises the superior man or woman, but it transforms them at the same time. The details of their character, of their genius, of their inmost nature disappear in the grandeur of

* I have left the titles in French and Italian. The musical student will easily supply their equivalents in English or Italian.—TR.

the portrait. Bossuet has assuredly written nothing more sublime than the funeral oration on Madame,* but for all that, there remains room by the side of it for the simple and truthful story of Mme. de Lafayette. The biographer does not contradict the orator, he completes the latter's work, he does not correct the portrait, he introduces the human element into it. Even the imperfections constitute part of the likeness and truth adds a poetry of its own to it. I would do for Alfred de Musset what Mme. de Lafayette did for Bossuet ; he has sung the praises of Maria Malibran : I would like to paint her.

To begin. What was the marked trait of her talent? The date of her début in Paris may help us to find it. She came about 1829, that is, when the revolution in art, literature, the drama and music was at its height. 'Hernani,' the 'Freischütz,' the 'Symphonies of Beethoven,' the 'Shipwreck of the Medusa,' had, in the world of art, let loose powers and storm-fiends hitherto unknown. La Malibran was the representative of that new form of art as La Pasta had been the sublime interpreter of the classical form of that art. Even in the works of Rossini there was about La Pasta's emotion a kind of dignity, a seriousness, a nobleness of expression which showed

* The title given to the daughters of the Kings of France, and even to the elder daughter of the Dauphin, also to the wife of the younger brother of the King, as in this instance to the wife of Gaston d'Orléans, the brother of Louis XIV. She was the daughter of Charles I and Marie-Henriette, and met with an untimely end.—TR.

the ties that bound it to the old school. La Pasta was truly the daughter of Sophocles, of Corneille, of Racine; La Malibran was the daughter of Shakespeare, of Victor Hugo, of Lamartine, of Alfred de Musset. Her genius owed everything to its spontaneity, to inspiration, to its effervescence, though at the same time, and this is one of the most characteristic aspects of that very complex organisation, nature condemned her to incessantly renewed attempts, to strenuous and assiduous labour. The mysterious fairy that had presided at her birth had granted her all the gifts of a great dramatic songstress, save one, a complete vocal instrument. Alfred de Musset said—

‘Ainsi nous consolait sa voix fraîche et sonore,’

and further on

‘Où sont ils, ces accents
Qui voltigeaient le soir sur la lèvre inspirée,
Comme un parfum léger sur l’aubépine en fleur?’

Well, with all due deference, La Malibran's voice did not flutter or skip; La Malibran's voice was not at all like a subtle perfume; La Malibran's voice was not at all like a fresh and ringing voice. Her vocal organ, pathetic and powerful, without a doubt, was hard and rebellious. When La Sontag sang, her notes were so limpid and brilliant that one might have compared them to a sudden flood of pure light. La Malibran's voice was like that most precious of all metals; it was like gold, but like gold it had to

be dug from the bowels of the earth ; it had to be separated from the ore ; it had to be forged and beaten, and made pliable like the metal under the hammer. One day in Rome where she was to play 'Le Barbier de Séville,' I heard her study the shakes of her cavatina. Every now and then she stopped short to interpellate her own voice, telling it in an angry tone : 'I'll see whether I cannot make you obey me.' The struggle, therefore, was a necessity, and had become a habit, which added to her invincible tenacity and her love for doing that which seemed impossible, invested her talent with a much more powerful and original character than the poet has described. In fact, he has lessened her individuality by suppressing all mention of that struggle.

To determine the real character of La Malibran we must remember the school in which that character was formed.

Garcia, her father, added to his marvellous talent as a singer the genuine science of a composer. Nourrit has told me that previous to his débuts, he went to Garcia for some hints.

'What are you going to sing to me?' asked Garcia.

'The aria from "Le Mariage Secret," "*Pria che spunti*."'

'Very well, I am listening.'

When Nourrit got to that part where the instru-

mental accompaniment is suspended — the point d'orgue—he executed a very tasteful *trait*.'

'That's all right,' said Garcia, 'give me another point d'orgue.'

Nourrit executed another.

'Go on, give me another.'

Nourrit executed a third.

'Go on, give me another.'

'I know no more,' said Nourrit.

'You know no more, after three points d'orgue. A true singer ought to be able to improvise ten, twenty, as many as he likes, for the real singer must be a real musician at the same time.'

This was the admirable, but harsh and rarely satisfied tutor of La Malibran.

One day after an hour's work, he said to her. 'You will never be more than a chorister.'

The girl of fourteen proudly tossed her tiny head. 'That chorister will have more talent than you,' she answered.

Two years later, in New York, her father entered her room one morning and in that voice at which everything and everybody trembled said, 'You will make your first appearance with me on Saturday in 'Otello.'

'On Saturday ; but that's in six days.'

'There is no need to tell me that.'

'You want me to study a part like Desdemona's in six days? You only give me six days to get used to the stage?'

‘I want none of your objections. You’ll make your first appearance on Saturday and be perfect, if not . . . in the last scene . . . when I am supposed to plunge my dagger into your breast, I’ll do so in real earnest.’

With a child of sixteen a like argument admits of no contradiction, consequently La Malibran rehearsed and played her part. Her success was absolutely startling and in the finale she produced an altogether unexpected and sensational effect, especially as far as her father was concerned. Those who have seen La Malibran as Desdemona will have no difficulty in remembering the novel character with which she invested Desdemona. Mme. Pasta was sublime in it, but she represented the part as that of a woman of twenty. La Malibran played it as a girl of sixteen. Her Desdemona was almost a child, hence, a delightful, fascinating, touch of innocence and submission, of childish simplicity, alternating with sudden outbursts of indignation and terror which produced a shudder among the audience. In the last scene when Otello strides towards Desdemona with uplifted dagger, La Pasta met him half-way, strong in the consciousness of her virtue and fearlessness; La Malibran, on the contrary, ran away, bereft of her senses, making for the doors and the windows, leaping and bounding about the room like a startled young fawn. On the night of Maria Malibran’s first appearance when her father succeeded in catching hold of her,

and raised his dagger, she entered so thoroughly into the spirit of her dual part of artist and daughter, the terrible expression of her terrible father's 'cross eyes,' seemed so fraught with her real death-warrant, that, grasping the hand that held the dagger in its downward movement, she bit it till it bled. Garcia uttered a subdued cry of pain which was mistaken by the audience for a cry of rage and the act wound up amidst frantic applause. These few lines portray the whole of the artist. That was the effect the footlights had upon her. At times she was so violently carried away by the situation as to have no thought left for its non-reality. Unable to arrange beforehand or to predict what she might do, for often she did not know it herself, she never failed to say to any and every fellow-singer who played Otello, 'You had better catch hold of me wherever you can in the last act, for I cannot answer for my movements. She never rehearsed her attitudes or gestures before a looking-glass, and often when on the stage she carried out the strangest inspirations with a boldness which stood her instead of skill. For instance: One day in the second act of 'Otello,' in that grand scene so full of anguish where Desdemona is awaiting the issue of the duel, did she not suddenly bethink herself to single out from the group of 'supers' a poor wight whom she had not given notice of her intention, and of dragging him to the footlights, where in a burst of despair and passion which narrowly missed arousing the laughter

of the audience, she asked him for news of the encounter. Well, the spontaneity of the thing and her evident sincerity carried everything before them. The poor 'super' felt so utterly terror-stricken as to be perfectly motionless, and his immobility served him admirably under the circumstances. What would have been ridiculous with anyone else, became sublime in her case.

The bold attempts which so frequently marked her acting were only equalled by the bold attempts that nearly always marked her singing. Those attempts were dangerous to a degree with an organ so refractory as hers. Let the reader imagine a general who wants to carry a position with a rush, with troops which cannot run. It is not difficult to predict the issue. In her case the attempt was attended with a peculiar dual result. When her imagination was at rest, she called her sterling science to her aid, for I have never met with a more able musician. She compounded with the refractory instrument, she coaxed and humoured it, the most experienced horseman could not use to greater advantage a horse that wants managing than she did her voice. Here is a striking proof of it. One evening when she was starting for the theatre to sing 'La Cenerentola,' one of her friends put the somewhat commonplace question: 'Well, madame, is your voice all right to-night?' 'Is my voice all right to-night?' she repeats in a cheerful tone, 'Look and judge for

yourself.' With this, she opened her mouth and showed him at the back of it one of those white patches which are the premonitory symptoms of a quincy.

'You are surely not going to sing with your throat in that state, madame?'

'Indeed I am. My throat and I know one another. We are often at loggerheads, and to-night I mean to make it carry me through till the very end without anyone being the wiser for our disagreement except myself. Come with me and you shall see. And she proved as good as her word. But if by some unfortunate coincidence her throat or larynx refused its services on one of the days when her inspiration got the better of her, then it was so much the worse for the instrument. There was sure to be a terrible struggle between it and her. She did not admit of its resisting her. She required it to execute everything she felt within herself. 'Bend or break' was the motto she applied to it. Sometimes, under the spell of one of those heroic efforts she managed to secure prodigious results which, most probably, she would not have obtained except by the most violent of means; but at other times, the weaker proved the stronger, the rebellious organ resisted, and La Malibran drifted into exaggeration. Nevertheless, incredible as it may seem—those uncertain moods added, if anything, another charm to her talent, the charm of the unexpected. With her the audience

was always in an excited state, under the influence of some kind of surprise. One might have watched her play the selfsame part a score of times, she never played it in the same manner. This craving for the unforeseen, the mania for venturing upon something new, often made her resort to hazardous and dangerous enterprises, from which she, however, always emerged by some miracle of will it would be difficult to describe. On one occasion, at some special performance of 'Otello,' she sang the part of Otello itself in the first act, that of Iago in the second and that of Desdemona in the third. Hers was a mezzo-soprano voice, which, as we know, holds the place between a contralto and a pure soprano. Well, a king upon conquest bent and hemmed in by two alien kingdoms is not more haunted by the ambition of invading his two neighbours' territories than was La Malibran by the desire of making excursions into the music bordering upon her own. The word 'limit' was unbearable to her; she found it impossible to grasp the fact that she could not do what anybody else in her profession did. She spent her life in trying to mount as high as La Sontag and to descend as low as La Pisaroni. One day to our great astonishment she executed a quaver on the top note of the soprano register.

'You seem astonished,' she said laughing, 'that brute of a note has given me no end of trouble, I can tell you. I have been trying to get at it for the last

month ; I tried while dressing, while doing my hair, I tried when taking my walks, when out riding. At last I got hold of it this morning while tying my shoe strings.'

'And where did you find it, madame?'

'There,' she answered, laughing, putting her finger to her forehead with a charming gesture, for one of the characteristic traits of that strange creature was to refer to her boldest attempts with a light, airy and natural grace. One felt that the apparently impossible was her rightful domain, and that she revelled in it.

Between the artist and his talent there is often a strange lack of resemblance, and the difference between his heart and his imagination is often so wide as to impress one like two sisters, the issue of two different marriages. Corneille was only heroic in his poetry ; Talma, it was said, was more or less of a coward ; in Maria Malibran the woman and the songstress were absolutely one, at any rate when face to face with danger. The boldness that never forsook her in her art, never forsook her in daily life. I and some friends happened to accompany her the first time she was on horseback. During our ride we came to a large ditch by the side of the road. The man who happens to escort a woman like that, is somewhat tempted to show off his skill ; one of our friends, an accomplished horseman, just touched his animal and jumped the ditch.

‘I want to jump it too,’ said La Malibran immediately.

‘But you do not know how to jump, madame.’

‘Then teach me.’

‘But your horse may refuse to take it.’

‘Your horse did not refuse it.’

‘But . . .’

‘But me no buts ; seeing that you did it, I can do it.’

And after a few explanations and instructions, she bravely jumps the ditch and turns round, laughing and triumphant. She not only had the contempt for, but the love of danger. Poor woman, it was that passion that killed her. She went down the stony hills by the side of the deepest ravines at a headlong gallop ; one day I started with her on a black horse and had to come back on a white ; she had led us such a dance throughout the day that our animals were covered with foam. We returned at six, and a few hours later met once more at Comte Moreni’s where she had promised to sing. She sang as she had ridden that day, or rather as if she had not been on horse-back at all. We went home at one in the morning. The first thing I did was to tell my servant not to wake me before eleven. At seven he entered my room.

‘What is the matter?’

‘A note from Mme. Malibran.’

‘Give it me. I wonder what has happened?’

It simply contained a few words: 'We'll meet on horseback at nine on the Place de la Concorde.'

And then there were people idiotic enough to say, and others sufficiently idiotic to believe, that her genius was made up of drunken fits, and that she imbibed rum in order to wind herself up. One might just as well talk of throwing red hot coals on a volcano to make it flare up.

Here are three delightful lines by Alfred de Musset—

'N'était-ce pas hier qu'enivrée et bénie,
Tu traversais l'Europe une lyre à la main,
Dans la mer en riant te jetant à la nage !'

The poet forgot to mention that she could not swim. One day, during a walk by the bay of Naples, a walk which was to wind up with a bath, the air was so pure and the water looked so beautiful that she had not the patience to wait until they had come close to the water, and suddenly unfastening her cloak which she wore over her bathing dress, she flung herself into the sea. Her friends are simply astounded, and keep looking, she suddenly reappears, smiling and fresh, but apparently unable to keep up.

'This is sheer madness, madame. You can scarcely keep afloat.'

'That's all right. I knew well enough you would not let me be drowned.'

It should, moreover, be said, that there was not

the least show about these foolhardy things, not the slightest desire to attract notice; it was simply so much natural courage on her part. I have before me a letter written by her from London, while Paris was in the throes of the revolution of July. She regrets that she was not in Paris, she would have liked to be in the thick of the battle, and to lay down her life in the cause of liberty. Every noble cause tempted her; her eccentric ebullitions of courage were simply so many instances of the effervescence of a hero's soul at a loss for something to do.

And now let us shift the scene once more to Paris: to 46 Rue de Provence. It is four o'clock in the afternoon of a spring day, and in a small, elegant but withal unpretentious, drawing-room, we behold a young woman, seated before her looking-glass, and putting the last touches to her hair. Around her, standing or leaning against the mantelpiece half-a-dozen men, among whom we notice Lamartine, Vitet,* and other notabilities in the world of art and letters. They are all talking, and La Malibran, while arranging her soft, brown hair in bands, a fashion she had started and which was soon adopted in Paris, replies to everyone, and holds her own in an unaffected natural manner, without the least pretension to pose as a Célimène. No woman was ever less coquettish than she. I have got an idea

* Louis Vitet, best known by his valuable historical works, 'États de Blois,' and 'États d'Orléans.—Tr.

that everyone around her was more or less in love with her ; but they were not jealous of one another, seeing that she made no distinctions in her somewhat cavalier treatment of all. Dominating the notes of that animated conversation, there rang upon her ear the distant sounds of an invisible violin to which she was for ever listening ; and that mysterious music drowned, as far as she was concerned, every word, even those of Lamartine with his semi-military, semi-aristocratic elegance, reminding one at the same time of the gentleman and the swaggering body guard, and which for all its occasional swagger was not exempt from a certain stiffness. All affectation, however, soon disappeared face to face with the rippling, spontaneous, smiling and childishly natural gaiety of the diva.

Lamartine had just been complimenting her on her linguistic aptitude ; for, in fact, she spoke four tongues with equal facility.

‘Yes,’ she replied, ‘it’s very convenient. It enables me to clothe my ideas in my own way. When I am at a loss for a word in one language, I take it from another ; I borrow a sleeve from the English, a collar from the German, a bodice from the Spanish.’

‘Which makes in all a charming harlequin’s dress.’

‘A harlequin’s dress if you like, but the harlequin never wears a mask.’

Some one else was praising a poet whose poverty

of ideas was only surpassed by his magnificent style. 'Don't talk to me of that talent,' she said; 'he produces a vapour bath with one drop of water.'

For, as a matter of course, praise and enthusiastic appreciation played a great part in the conversation. She generally cut it short with a kind of impatience, especially when they attempted to institute comparisons to the disadvantage of another great artist. She had a boundless admiration for Mdlle. Sontag. 'If I only had her voice,' she said one day.

'Her voice, her voice,' repeated one of the company, I admit she has a pretty voice, but not an atom of soul.'

'No soul,' protested La Malibran. 'Say, she has known no sorrow and you'll be nearer the mark. Her misfortune is that she has been too uniformly happy. In that respect I have the advantage over her. I have been sorely tried. But you provide her with a tragic subject, and you will soon see what she'll do with the voice which you choose to treat as merely pretty.'

A twelvemonth later, La Sontag, after a great misfortune that had befallen her, appeared for the first time in the part of Doña Anna. She was simply superb and scored an enormous success. 'I told how it would be!' exclaimed La Malibran.

One more trait to convey that compound of modesty and confidence in herself which marked her character. One morning I happened to run against

her in the Rue Taitbout. While we stood chatting for a moment, a carriage passed, and leaning out of its window a little girl, frantically kissing her hand.

‘Who is the little girl?’ I asked.

‘That little girl . . . that’s a little girl who’ll simply eclipse all of us ; it’s my little sister Pauline.’ The little sister became Mme. Viardot (Garcia).*

Was Maria Malibran what is called a great tragic actress? would Maria Malibran have been able if she had lost her voice to transform herself into a great tragic actress? It is a delicate point, deserving of a moment’s attention. People are apt to confound two branches of art, constantly marching side by side, now and then mingling with one another ;—but more often parting company and absolutely contradicting one another ; the art of the singer, and the art of the actor. Tragedy and opera, speech and song, music and poetry are each governed by its own laws and their means of action and expression. To the genuine singer the art of acting is only the handmaid to the art of song, and if the handmaid hampers him the master dismisses her. In the selfsame situation the tragedian should drop his arms and the singer should raise them, the tragedian should partially close his mouth and the singer should open it at its widest, the tragedian should storm and rave, the singer should remain perfectly motionless. Why? Because the beauty of sound, the accuracy of sound is

* The famous ‘creatix’ of Fidès in ‘Le Prophète.’—TR.
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the first law of the singer, and the most telling pantomimic play, as far as he is concerned, that which enables him to produce his sound in the most telling fashion. Are there not female singers who only succeed in producing certain *bravura* effects by indulging in the oddest facial contortions? Well, people are simply blind to the grimaces, they only hear the sound. The most pathetic lyric artist is only a tragic actor at certain moments, often he is no tragic actor at all. Is there a voice which has drawn more tears than that of Rubini? and yet he was neither a comedian nor a tragedian; the whole of his power of expression lay entirely in his voice. I had a striking proof of this one day at a friend's house. They asked him to sing the cavatina from the third act of 'La Somnambula,' '*Il più tristo fra i mortali*,' in which he rose to the highest pitch of emotion. 'I'm agreeable, but only on one condition,' he said, 'you must let me go into that little room there, I won't sing in this drawing-room full of people.' As a matter of course, we were only too glad to accept his condition, and while he sang there was not 'a dry eye' in the room. What do you think he had been doing while he was singing? He had been having a game of cards. No doubt this was an exceptional and wonderful *tour de force* which, as he himself said, he had only accomplished by a great effort, but it shows the independence of one another of those two arts—the art of the singer and the art of the tragedian.

Here is another and still more remarkable instance of the difference between those two arts. Most of us have been delighted by the acting of Roger when he was the tenor of the Opéra-Comique and Opéra. Nevertheless, when towards the end of his career he wanted to assume a dramatic rôle in a drama, he only succeeded partially. The habits he had contracted as a lyric artist when applied to a speaking part gave him not only a strange air, but the air of a foreigner ; *he spoke with an accent*. Therefore, I will not say of Mme. Malibran that she was a great tragedian, she was too great a singer for that, and her art often compelled her to make her acting subservient to her singing, nor will I say that she might have become a great tragic actress, for I do not know that she might have done so. Who knows whether, if bereft of her musical genius, she would have remained her own self? Samson, after having been deprived of his hair was no longer Samson. But one thing is certain, no lyric artist ever brought to bear upon her musical interpretation, the passion, the grace, the facial animation, the gesticulation she did.

That exuberance of life, that effervescence of sentiment and action was often and suddenly succeeded by days of calm and silence. It was neither moroseness nor sadness, merely a kind of semi-sleep. Her imagination was asleep until some unforeseen circumstances, as often as not utterly inexplicable,

awakened it with a start. Then she awoke 'with a vengeance.'

III

The autumn of 1832 is as it were a luminous point in my memory. It was the period of my first visit to Rome. My days were spent in looking at the monuments, in lingering in the museums, the palaces, among the ruins, in lounging about the streets, and every evening I went to the Villa Medici, to the Académie de France, at that time presided over by Horace Vernet. He, as it were, represented the glory of the institution, his wife the kindly, gracious hospitality, and his daughter the graceful elegance. The Villa Medici seemed the most natural framework for Mdlle. Louise Vernet. With her pure, cameo-like face, enhanced by some nameless poetical reflection of Raphael's Virgins; when moving among those magnificent statues of antiquity and the Renaissance she merely looked like 'one more Roman girl,' added to the rest. I shall never forget the day when I saw her first. It was at the Colosseum; I was alone and had seated myself on the lowest steps of the amphitheatre; I was looking down at the ground, seeking with 'my mind's eye,' as Shakespeare says, the traces of vanished generations. All at once I looked up and between two broken arches right at the top of the building, beheld, mingling with the sky as it were, a young girl, radiantly beautiful who was slowly

descending the steps. For a moment it seemed to me that I was looking upon a priestess of Vesta, going to take her seat among her pious sisters.

Our evenings at the Villa Medici were spent in constantly varied amusements. Sometimes Mdlle. L. Vernet took the tambourine,* and danced the saltarello with her father who might have passed for an elder brother. Then again, Horace Vernet would fetch the collected works (engraved) of Poussin, for Poussin was his favourite master, and explain to us the meaning of the secret underlying his compositions, always so full of deep thought. Nothing could have been more curious than the interpretation of that powerful genius by that active intellect. Those interesting 'talks' about art were frequently succeeded by impromptu concerts, hence the reader may imagine my joy and surprise when, one evening on my arrival at the Villa Medici, I beheld La Malibran. I remember the picture of that 'interior' as if I had seen it but yesterday. La Malibran was seated by the table and doing some embroidery. Facing her and close to her, but almost at her feet was Mdlle. Vernet on a kind of tapestry low chair, listening to La Malibran, with uplifted eyes. The lamp cast its light, as far as its shade would permit, on those two faces, one of which represented beauty

* M. Legouv   says the 'tambour de basque,' but the tambour de basque is only a tambourine with small bells instead of small discs in the rim.—TR.

in its bloom, the other genius in all its splendour ; both representing youth. My first surprise having subsided, hope took its place, which hope I communicated in a whisper to Mdlle. Vernet.

‘Don’t rejoice too quickly,’ she said. ‘She’ll not sing. She is in one of her silent moods. For the last three nights we have not been able to drag a note out of her. She comes in, very sweet and smiling, sits down in the place where she is now, takes up her embroidery and becomes engrossed with her slippers as if it were a score by Mozart. For the time being the great artist has been ousted by the little bourgeoisie.’

Nevertheless, on the fourth day, the conversation having turned on Lord Byron whom Mdlle. Vernet admired intensely, ‘Childe Harold’ was fetched from the library and the fourth canto, the canto devoted to Rome, was selected. As we all knew English, the evening was spent in reading, translating and reciting the best passages. La Malibran, full of passionate admiration and intelligent appreciation, mingled her original remarks with our enthusiastic delight ; but words and words only fell from her lips, not a note came from her throat, and when we left, at one in the morning, Horace Vernet said to me laughing :—

‘We had better resign ourselves to the fact, the bird of omen is still on its travels.’

We had made an appointment for the next day at the Villa Pamphili. The October afternoons in Rome are delightful, the air seems more scented, more pun-

gent even than in the mornings of Spring. When La Malibran joined us, there was the same dreamy look on her face. In the course of our walk we came upon a very shady nook, a kind of leafy circle or rather a circus. Under foot a soft, silky green sward, on each side, grand, spreading pines, interspersed with a kind of shrub, yielding a species of wild strawberries; at the back a spring and a fountain. The spring splashed into a tiny basin of granite; behind the fountain was a small platform flanked by a short double flight of marble stairs of eight or ten steps. The cool water, the heat of the afternoon proved too great a temptation to La Malibran who ran like a child and put her head under the jet of water, after which she came back to us with her hair dripping. As a matter of course the water had disarranged her hair which fell loose on her shoulders. As she shook it in order to dry it, the sun, piercing through the foliage, threw his light on the crystal-like drops and converted them into so many twinkling stars. All at once, in looking up she noticed the platform behind the fountain. I am unable to determine the nature of the thought that struck her, but her face underwent a sudden change, the smile vanished from her lips to make room for a strange and somewhat solemn expression; she turned towards the marble staircase and slowly ascended its steps, her hair still loose on her shoulders. When she reached the platform, from which she could look down upon us, she glanced up

at the sky and intoned the 'Invocation to Diana'; '*Casta Diva*' from 'Norma.' I know not whether it was surprise, the strange scene around us, or the pleasure of listening in that spot to the voice which had been silent so long, that stirred our hearts to their very depths. I know not whether she herself was deeply moved by her sudden apparition on that kind of pedestal, but her notes lingering long among the leafy vault, mingling with the splash of the water, with the soft, balmy breeze, with the delightful atmosphere of that natural garden, were invested with an awe-inspiring grandeur that made the tears course down our cheeks. As we beheld her, towering above us, enframed by the sky and the foliage she struck us as some supernatural being. When she came down, her face still bore an expression of solemn earnestness; we, on our side, uttered our first compliments in an almost reverent tone. A scene like that affording so clear insight into that strange character might well be unique in the life of an artist. Four years later, however, I witnessed another of those sudden awakenings of her genius, which seemed to explode in her like a blaze of fire and flame.

That was in 1836. She came to Paris to be married to Bériot. Her travels and her frequent absence had interrupted our intercourse without affecting our friendship. She asked me to be one of the witnesses at her civil marriage. When the *maire* recited that passage from the Code which en-

joins the wife 'to be obedient to her husband,' she pulled such a comical face, accompanied by such a funny shrug of the shoulders that the functionary himself could not help smiling. In the evening we all went to M. Troupenas's, the publisher, whose private dwelling was in the Rue Saint-Marc. The gathering was almost exclusively confined to artists and literary men, there was no attempt at an 'at home' as we understand it now-a-days. Thalberg had promised to come, he had never heard La Malibran, nor had she ever seen him. The moment he came in, she went up to him, pressing him to sit down and play.

'Play before you, madame,' said Thalberg; 'I could not think of it. Besides, I am too anxious to hear you.'

'But you'll not hear me, Monsieur Thalberg, I am not supposed to be here at all, it is merely a woman dead tired with the fatigues of the day. I haven't a note left, I should be simply execrable.'

'So much the better, it will give me courage.'

'You insist upon it? Very well, you shall have your wish.'

She was as good as her word. Her voice was harsh, there was not a sparkle of genius in it. Even her mother remarked upon, and chided her for it.

'I can't help it, mama. A woman only gets married once in her life.' *

* According to M. Legouv  , La Malibran said, 'On ne se marie qu'une fois.' I have endeavoured to convey her meaning as closely as

She had forgotten that she had married M. Malibran ten years previously.

‘Now it’s your turn, monsieur Thalberg.’

He had not been married that morning, and the presence of such a listener putting him on his mettle without unduly exciting him, he drew from his instrument all that wealth and suppleness of tone which made it the most harmonious of singers. As he went on, La Malibran’s face gradually changed, her lack lustre eyes became bright, the mouth gradually expanded, the nostrils began to quiver. When his last notes had died away, she said, ‘Admirable ! Now it’s my turn.’ And forthwith she intones a second piece. But this time there was no appearance of either fatigue or listlessness, and Thalberg, absolutely bewildered, sat watching the transformation without being able to believe in it. It was no longer the same woman, it was no longer the same voice, and all he could do was to say in a low voice, ‘Oh, madame, madame.’ She had barely finished when he said animatedly, ‘Now it’s my turn.’

Only those who heard Thalberg on that evening may perhaps flatter themselves that they have known the ‘whole man.’ Part of La Malibran’s genius had communicated itself to his masterly but severe style ;

possible. I doubt, however, whether even she could have meant this literally, though her union with M. Bériot was probably the only one she considered ‘morally valid.’—TR.

he had caught the feverish passion of her soul. Currents of electric fluid ran from his fingers over the keyboard. But he could not finish his piece. At the last bars, La Malibran burst into violent sobs, she hid her face in her hands, she shivered from head to foot and we had to carry her into the next room. She did not remain there very long ; in a few moments she reappeared, with proud uplifted head, and flashing eyes, and rushing to the piano, she exclaimed : ‘ Now, it’s my turn.’ She resumed that strange duel, and sang one after another four pieces, increasing in grandeur as she went, unconscious of everything around her in her growing excitement, until she noticed Thalberg’s face bathed in tears as hers had been. Never have I grasped more fully the meaning of the words, ‘ omnipotence of art,’ than at the sight of those two great artists, unknown to one another but a few hours before, and suddenly revealing themselves to one another ; imparting the electric current of their genius to one another, and rising, borne up by one another, into regions of art which, until then, they had never attained.

IV

A few months later she had ceased to live. What was the cause of her death ? If we are to believe Alfred de Musset, it was the soul that wore out the body, which was too frail and bent beneath the burden the relentless muse had secretly laid upon it.

Musset's verses are no doubt admirable, Bossuet himself never soared higher nor went farther. But with all due deference, the poet in this instance is like the great orator, and this ode of his possessed only the relative truth of a magnificent discourse over an open tomb. For La Malibran did not bend like a twig beneath the strain of the muse, her genius was not concentrated in a broken body, she did not die wasted by her own genius, soul and fame. Her fame she bore lightly enough, and as for her genius, it was the torch that communicates a gentle heat, not the torch that burns up. Nor was it her soul that killed her. It possessed the strength requisite to bear her up instead of crushing her. There is no doubt that she shed genuine tears when she sang the 'Willow Song'; the cries she uttered were also real enough, but her cheek lost none of its plumpness or colour through them. No clammy, trembling hand was laid against her throbbing temples every day; she belonged to that vigorous race of the Garcias, cut out as it were for the struggle and the victory. Such beings charged as they are with electricity are no more spent with their efforts at expansion than is a centre of light by the beams it flashes forth. They virtually live by what they spend. It is rest that would kill them.

Death seized upon La Malibran when she was in the full flush of her power. She did not die from over-excitement, she died from a fall off her horse. I have not the least hesitation in brutally opposing

prose to poetry; according to me, it is a positive wrong to those exceptional organisations to endeavour to reduce them to a kind of *poetical unity*. They are much more lavishly endowed than that. Their grandeur lies in their complexness and in the contrasts they present. Let us try, then, to advance another step in the study of that truly strange being. In La Malibran there was a distinct antithesis between her imagination and her heart. Nothing could be more fiery, more reckless than that imagination, and added to that venturesome character I have endeavoured to sketch, these two were, undoubtedly, the most untamable pair condemned to run in harness. But the third horse, for each of us is a vehicle drawn by three horses—the mind, the character, and the heart—well, the heart was altogether of a different race from the others,' it was more affectionate than passionate, more tender than ardent, it was as the English say, gentle. Her heart provided that part which the imagination often refused. Throughout her life and with regard to her affections, there were none of those startling eccentricities, none of those conspicuous disturbances, none of those whimsical extravagances which nature seems, as it were, to thrust upon artists, swayed by their imagination. Even the irregular phase in her life was regular, she made it a point to give it the conventional sanction of regularity as soon as she could.

A very curious book on Miss Fanny Kemble which

Mme. Augustus Craven has just given to the reading public throws an altogether new light on the inmost feelings of artists. One cannot help noticing how full of contrast they, the feelings, are. That grand family of tragedians is full of them. Mrs Siddons, the pathetic Juliet, the sympathetic Desdemona, the relentless Lady Macbeth carried the domestic virtues to the verge of austerity. Miss Fanny Kemble had both the genius for and the aversion to the stage at the same time. The moment she set foot on the boards, she was so thoroughly carried away by the inspiration of tragedy, that the boards themselves seemed to emit intoxicating vapours like those enveloping the tripod of the priestess at Apollo's oracle at Delphi. But, the moment she got back to the wings, her uncompromising, maidenly modesty got the upperhand once more. She felt ashamed at seeing her name on a playbill. She felt ashamed at having to depict sentiments which were not hers. She felt ashamed at having to appear at a public gathering. She felt ashamed at being applauded. She felt almost inclined to consider that applause as an instance of shocking familiarity on the part of her audience. Those strange beings are so complex as to elude the laws of psychological logic at any and every moment by some contradiction which is calculated to puzzle one. One might quote instances of some who seem to have dual souls, a 'stage-soul' which they leave behind in their dressing-rooms with

their costume, and another soul for everyday life which they recover at home with their ordinary garments. Has not Madame Ristori afforded us an inconceivable instance of that dualism. I have never met with a more passionate, fiery actress, with one possessed to the same degree by the demon of tragedy. Yet, when she came to Paris for the first time, she was nursing her last child. Well, on the days she was acting, she brought her baby with her to the theatre, put it to sleep, and went to give it the breast during the intervals of 'Myrrha,' of 'Myrrha' which is simply the most monstrously passionate of all dramatic works. Did the part of nurse detract from the part of the tragic actress? By no means. Did the part of the tragic actress detract from the part of the nurse? No more than in the other case. I am, no doubt, quoting an exceptional fact, which may be solely accounted for by the strength of organisation possessed by Mme. Ristori; but La Malibran also showed us numberless contrasts of feeling, altogether unlooked for. Though she was the very incarnation of vitality, and the faculty of intensely enjoying herself was one of the marked traits of her character, the thought of death often obtruded itself. She always said that she should die young. At times she became utterly prostrate with fits of melancholy and sat crying for hours and hours, as if she had suddenly been chilled by the ice-cold touch of death, as if the shadow of another world had suddenly darkened her imagination.

I have before me as I write, a note couched as follows: 'Come and see me at once. I am absolutely choking with tears, all the horrible ideas let loose by Death, are holding high Sabbath on my pillow, and Death himself heads the procession.'

Her forebodings were only too well founded.

She had gone to London in the spring, and an influential member of the aristocracy knowing her fondness for horse exercise, had placed all his horses at her disposal. Among them there was one called the 'King of the stables.' It was as dangerous as it was charming. Nothing would do but that she should ride that horse, and all the prudent counsels of her friends were in vain. The danger only proved an additional temptation. The animal threw her, and she was mortally shaken and bruised in the fall. She gave strict orders not to tell Bériot of the accident and went on singing. The whole of her body was so terribly bruised that three days later at a performance of 'Tancrède,' a chorister having touched her elbow while assisting her to alight from one of those triumphal cars which are only to be found on the Italian operatic stage, she cried out with pain. Lablache, from whom I have got all these particulars soon noticed that the crises of melancholy sadness followed one another more rapidly, and that she often burst into tears without any apparent cause. One day she went with her fellow-singers, to try a new organ in one of the smaller towns near London.

The only piece Grisi could think of to try that magnificent instrument with was the 'rondo' of 'Les Puritains.' The moment she rose La Malibran took her seat and effaced, as it were, from the keyboard the traces of that profane melody by a sublime air of Handel, for she was as versed in the most severely classical works as in the most brilliant. But before the end of the piece she suddenly stopped, and remained before the keyboard, motionless, and lost in thought.

A few days later there was a grand musical festival in aid of a charity at which she had promised to sing, and though suffering horribly she went and did sing. She was frantically applauded but on leaving the stage she dropped almost fainting to the floor. The public who knew nothing of this would take no denial and clamoured for her to come back, while she lay absolutely helpless. The stage manager had just made up his mind to inform the audience of what had happened and of the impossibility of complying with their requests, when La Malibran partly recovered consciousness, awakened probably by the repeated calls, the echo of which faintly reached her. With a wave of her hand she stops the manager, rises from her chair, brushes him aside, appears once more before the footlights and with that kind of nervous energy which resembles what on the battlefield is termed '*la furia francese*' she once again sings her piece. One may easily picture its effect on the audience,

but she had scarcely reached the wing when 'she dropped in a heap' and had to be carried to the green-room. Bériot, whose turn came immediately after hers, entered by the 'centre back' while she was being carried off to the right, consequently he neither saw nor heard anything of all this.

The moment they got her into the green-room there were cries on all sides for a doctor. There happened to be one on the spot. 'We must bleed her immediately,' he said or she may choke in a moment.'

'Don't bleed her,' thundered Lablache, 'I forbid you to bleed her, I know the state she is in, and bleeding may kill her.'

'And I tell you,' replied the doctor, that unless we bleed her this moment, she will be a corpse the next.'

'I am speaking in Bériot's name,' retorts Lablache. 'He alone can decide, he is on the stage now, playing his solo. I am going to fetch him.' With this Lablache rushes out of the room and makes his way to the wings. Bériot had just begun his *allegro*, and encouraged by the enthusiastic applause of the audience was executing a series of *arpeggios*, *pizzicatos*, and other 'bravuras of the bow' which marked him as the most graceful, the most elegant, the most fascinating of all the great artists.

Lablache was quivering with impatience on the very threshold of the stage itself. Exasperated by the horrible contrast between those pretty sounds issuing from the violin and the terrible scene which

was being enacted in the green-room, he stood stamping with rage, holding out his arms towards Bériot, calling him in that undertone so well known to actors, but his voice was lost amidst the applause of the house. At last the piece is finished, Lablache is about to rush on the stage, but the allegro is 'encored,' and Bériot begins it once more. Five minutes elapse in that way until Bériot leaves the stage, when Lablache almost drags him to the green-room, where they behold Maria Malibran seated in an armchair, both arms bare and hanging by the side of her body, with staring and glassy eyes, the face as white as marble and two veins opened. The blood still trickling slowly from them gave her the appearance of a victim of some crime. Thirty-six hours later, there was nothing left of Maria Malibran but a name.

V

Shall we say with Musset—

‘Meurs donc ! ta mort est douce et ta tache est remplie ?’

Yes, Musset was right. Death was the best thing that could have come to her. What, after all, could life have had in store for her? Nothing but sorrow and suffering. An actress may grow old, her talent does not fade with her face and youth. Age renews that talent in affecting a transformation. Her theatrical life is, in fact, nothing but a series of transfor-

mations. In her parts, she passes from the ingénues to young women, from young women to young matrons, from young matrons to elder matrons, then to grandmothers, there is room for success and for her art in all those parts, grey hairs do not militate against the talent of the actress. But the songstress is forcibly condemned to remain young. The very moment she has reached maturity, she begins to look like those trees in full leaf which at their summit show a withered branch. Her voice dies within her very long before she herself dies ; and there begins the martyrdom of finding herself, while brimful of life, chained to a corpse. To be young in body, young in face, with the intelligence unimpaired, the heart beating as fast as ever, the talent as vigorous as possible, and to have to drag behind one like a chain that organ which is fast breaking, that instrument which is cracking, that sound which no longer obeys, that assuredly is martyrdom. There are voices made of pure crystal, like those of Alboni, La Sontag, Mme. Damoreau—I am only quoting names that have disappeared—to which are granted respites, but La Malibran's organ was doomed to early extinction. What, under such circumstances, would she have done ? Surrendered and remained silent ? She would have been incapable of doing it. She would have engaged in a terrible battle with age. She would have struggled against the wrinkles in her voice as women in society struggle with the wrinkles in their faces. It would have been

heartrending. Yes, death was the best thing that could have befallen her. She took wing like the angel of Tobit in Rembrandt's admirable picture, leaving behind her a long track of light; and her premature death insured the immortality of her memory, for has not Alfred de Musset celebrated it in song?

* * * * *

I had not the courage to interrupt the story of a life which was so very pathetic and poetical, even to let the artist speak for herself, but now I feel the want of adding to it some fragments of letters which will, as it were, constitute a kind of authentic guarantee of the likeness of the portrait I have endeavoured to sketch. I said elsewhere that both her glory and her art sat lightly upon her. Here is an extract from a letter written from Naples in 1834, consequently two years before her death. 'I am the happiest of women, the idea of changing my name acts like a tonic upon me. I am in perfect health, and as for the fatigue of the stage, it positively refreshes me. (C'est pour moi, un sorbet.)'

In another letter she adds, with that oddity of expression which was entirely her own: 'My voice is *stento resque*, my body *falstaffique*, my appetite *canni balien*.'

The dissolution of her marriage with M. Malibran, was the engrossing business of her life. She pursued it for many years, amidst a great deal of anguish.

Her most ardent wish was to relinquish the name she had made famous, and to transfer its glory to another one, already illustrious, to bear which she aspired. She succeeded in her wish, thanks to the intelligent and devoted care of M. Cottinet, the attorney, and the father of M. Edmond Cottinet, our clever colleague who has already given proof of a great deal of talent, and who has still more in reserve than he has shown.

La Malibran's letters to Mme. Cottinet are full of the liveliest and most affectionate expressions of gratitude. The affectionate disposition to which I have alluded more than once shows itself plainly in them. 'While I live,' she writes, 'I will never forget the dear beings who have taken as much interest in me as if I had been their own daughter. And, in fact, am I not almost your own daughter, and your sister at the same time? And your friend besides. All three in one. How delightful it is for me to be able to say so.' And a little further on, she writes, 'Amidst all my hopes and fears, I think of you, and the thought gives me courage.'

I have spoken of her fits of depression. They sprang alike from her imagination, her forebodings and the painful complications of her life.

'APRIL 1831.

'There are, no doubt, many women who envy me. I fail to see what there is to arouse their envy. I suppose it is that "unfortunate" happiness of mine.

‘Do you know what my happiness is like? It is like Juliet, and like Juliet stark dead, while I, well, I am Romeo, and weeping like him.

‘My heart is filled to overflowing with tears, the source of which is pure, they shall water the flowers on my grave when I shall have departed this world. The next will, perhaps, give me my reward above.

‘Away with those lugubrious, I might say cadaverous ideas, for just now they are cadaverous. Death stalks at their head; it will soon strike at mine.

‘Forgive me for this. I am afraid I don’t know what I am saying. I am crying and find relief in making you the sharer of my inmost thoughts.

‘You will not be angry with me, I feel sure. In fact, I do not think you could be angry with me, if you would. Come and tell me that you sympathise with me. Come at once, and we’ll talk; we’ll be in another world, and I’ll shut my door against this one.’

I have alluded to the gracefulness of her mind. Do not the following lines show this better than I could.

‘You are right, bring the German paper with you, and we’ll read it together, two are not too many to read a German paper. I have got a notion, though, that we’ll leave it on the table, for we’ll be able to do better, we’ll invent one, that of the little world in

which we live. . . . You know which I mean. Good-bye, I am going, I am getting away from the paper and ink which would tempt me to go on writing for evermore. Do you know why I feel so cheerful? It is because the weather is lovely, and I feel that it is spring time within me.'

I have spoken of her courage. Here is a letter written after the revolution of July.

‘NORWICH, AUGUST 1830.

‘I feel pleased, proud and vainglorious to a degree to belong to the French nation. (She was born in Paris). You regret you were away. I, a woman, am regretting every hour of the day that I had not a leg broken in the fray for that cause which belongs to the golden age. For does not the real golden age mean to revolt for one's freedom and to fling back at the same time, even the semblance of an usurpation on other nations. I assure you that at the mere thought of Paris, my soul takes higher flights. Do you think that any number of soldiers armed with rifles could have prevented me from crying, “Vive la liberté?” They tell me that everything is not quiet yet in France. Tell me whether this is true, and I will come and share the fate of my brothers. “Charity begins at home,” they say. Well, in this case France is my home the others are my brothers. Vive la France.’

To those quotations which I might indefinitely prolong, I will only add a last trait to complete the likeness.

The violent character of her father had often raised terrible storms in their otherwise affectionate intercourse. They had parted company long ago and been on the worst possible terms for years when Garcia arrived in Paris, aged and soured. An extraordinary performance is organised at the Italian Opera, and the bills inform the public that M. Garcia will sing the part of Otello, Mme. Malibran that of Desdemona. I have never seen the public more excited, for I need scarcely say that I was there. Enter Garcia, then La Malibran; after them Lablache who represents Brabantio. Whether it was the presence of his daughter or some other cause operating, I am unable to say, but the old lion recovered for the nonce all the sublime accents of his powerful voice. And the daughter herself, electrified, unhinged, no doubt, by this sudden contact so full of bitter pathos, instinctively found in the delightful duo with the nurse and in the finale of the first act those genuine accents which sounded as it were so much like an 'anticipated echo' of the 'Willow Song,' that the curtain fell amidst a delirium of applause. I am going too fast. During the finale Otello stands at the 'prompt side,' that is, to the right of the audience, Desdemona on the opposite. While the curtain was being lowered, when it was but a yard from the ground, I noticed Desdemona's feet running quickly towards those of Otello. There was a stentorian cry for both and when the curtain rose once more, they appeared side

by side, and the one was nearly as black as the other. In flinging herself into the arms of her father, Desdemona had rubbed a considerable quantity of black from Otello's face on hers. It was very comical, and yet, no one took it into his head to laugh at it. The public which had got wind of the secret, understanding the pathos of the scene they had not seen, utterly forgot to look at the grotesque consequences of it and frantically applauded that father and that daughter reconciled by means of their art, their talent, and their triumphant success. They had embraced one another for the sake of their common love of Rossini.*

* Throughout this chapter I have left the name of Otello as the Italians spell it.—TR.

CHAPTER VII

Hector Berlioz.—The reproach against Italian Music.—Lablache.—The Artist.—His Absentmindedness.—The Story of the two Hats as told by Prince Albert. — Rubini. — No Actor, at times greater than any Actor. — The Italian Opera between 1829-31. — A Special Audience.—Berlioz.—M. Legouvé's First Meeting with him. — The beginning of their Acquaintance next Morning.—Berlioz and Miss Smithson.—Berlioz's Courtship.—Berlioz as a Singer and Instrumentalist.—The Real Man as distinct from the Reputed One.—A Sonata by Beethoven.—Berlioz' good-natured contempt for Italian Music.—Berlioz' Love-Affairs.

I

THE domain of art is like the paradise of Dante. It is composed of luminous circles, rising above one another. Happy those who, like myself, find on the threshold of each circle, as in 'The Divine Comedy,' a new guide who stretches forth his hand and helps them to reach a higher sphere.

Maria Malibran taught me to appreciate dramatic music, Italian music and Rossini; Berlioz taught me to appreciate instrumental music and Glück. But, heaven be praised, if he taught me to worship that of which, hitherto, I had been ignorant, he failed to make me burn that which until then I had worshipped. I have never been able to understand why admiration for one thing should kill the admiration for another

thing, why the present must necessarily live at the expense of the past, why our soul should not be powerful enough to extend itself in proportion to the widening of the horizon of our enthusiasm, in such a manner as to find a new place for a new deity.

Polytheism is the true religion in matters of art. Heaven forbid that I should deny the beauty of Italian music, because people no longer care for it. The grievance against it is its gracefulness,—people twit it with importing elegance even into the manifestation of grief and sorrow. It may be true; nevertheless, it possesses the greatest of all advantages, it is made up of light. It has the further advantage of blending admirably with the human voice, of lending itself to its most pliant inflections, to its most delicate refinements, nay, to its most preposterous whims. Lablache, when dying, summed up in one phrase the characteristics of that delightful Italian art. His daughter was standing by his bedside; he opened his mouth to speak to her, the sound died away on his lips . . . ‘Oh,’ he murmured, ‘*no ho più voce, moro.*’ (My voice is gone, I am dying). The accidental mention of Lablache’s name compels me to say to Berlioz—‘My friend, you must wait.’ I should be ungrateful indeed if I did not devote a few parting words to the two artists who cast their charm over the days of my youth, to the two most illustrious exponents of the Italian style—Lablache and Rubini. To speak of them means to revive for a moment a

vanished art, it will afford me at the same time the opportunity of putting the first touches to the portrait of Berlioz; for that epoch is virtually his, it has strongly influenced him and in that way the digression will become merely a transition.

People often speak of an artist as being 'beloved of the public.' This hackneyed expression is strictly correct in the case of Lablache. At the first sound of his voice there was such a current of sympathy between him and his audience that not a single one among them could prevent 'his heart going out to him.' Lablache's voice still rings in the ears of those who have heard him. Lablache's figure is still present to the imagination of those who have seen him. That colossal voice had so much sweetness in it, the face of the colossus showed so much kindness that he seemed to be doubly Olympian—a thunderbolt - launching and a smile - dispensing Jove at one and the same time. Terrible and touching in the pathetic passages, he had, moreover, such a rhythmic power that, in the concerted pieces, he seemed to bear the burden of the whole; he was as it were their living architecture. Finally, with Lablache there disappeared that charming and altogether individual product of Italian genius—buffa music. Cimarosa died when Lablache went to his grave. 'La Cenerentola,' 'L'Italienne à Alger,' nay, the 'Barbier' itself died with Lablache. No one has succeeded in laughing to music since Lablache

There may be some buffoons left, buffos have disappeared. That wholesome gaiety, coming straight from the heart, that exquisite taste even in farce, that gracefulness even in exaggeration, that beauty of sound mingling with the sprightliness of humour, we shall know no more. Besides, Lablache had received excellent lessons in acting from an old artist who was himself a remarkable actor—namely, his father-in-law. In connection with that tuition he one day told me an interesting and significant story.

Being entrusted, when he was still a young man, with the part of Frederick the Great in a new opera, he read everything bearing upon the character of the King of Prussia and endeavoured to conjure up and to imitate his walk, his gestures, his attitudes;—and on the evening of the dress rehearsal invited his father-in-law to come and see him. ‘You have done very well,’ said the latter at the termination of the performance, you carried your head on one side like Frederick, you tottered at the knees like Frederick, you have even reproduced the features of Frederick, but why did you not take snuff? That was one of his habits.’ ‘Not take snuff?’ replied Lablache, ‘why I filled my waistcoat pockets with it and took it at every possible opportunity.’ ‘That’s just it, my lad,’ remarked his father-in-law with a smile, you took it at every possible opportunity, but you did not take any at the right moment. In the second act there is a capital situation; I mean where

the wife of the officer who has disobeyed orders throws herself at the King's feet, to implore the King's pardon for her husband. At that moment everyone's eye is fixed on Frederick, the public is, and those on the stage are supposed to be, anxious to know what he, (Frederick) is going to do. If at that moment, before answering, you had taken a pinch of snuff, it would have created a greater impression than your "taking" snuff all throughout the piece. Instead of which you have been taking snuff "up hill and down dale," when no one was looking at you. All this has been of no use to you from the graphic point of view. You reproduced the habit of the King, but you did not impress the public with a living illustration of it.'

But you should have heard Lablache himself tell the story, for in him the narrator was almost equal to the singer, a sufficiently rare merit in a man so absent-minded as he was. His absent-mindedness which had become proverbial, gave rise to many comic incidents and to a curious instance of theatrical observation. One day at Naples he forgot his little daughter who was only five years old, and never missed her until the afternoon when on his return home, his wife asked him what had become of her. Prince Albert was very fond of telling how, having granted an interview to Lablache who came to ask for a remission of sentence for some poor wretch, he could scarcely forbear from laughing outright on

seeing him enter the room. Lablache, though somewhat disconcerted begins his tale in the most touching tone, but the prince's gaiety seems to increase in direct proportion to Lablache's melancholy, until at last he takes the singer's hand and leads him to a looking glass, saying, 'Look at yourself.' Lablache had two hats, one on his head and the other in his hand; the latter belonged to one of the persons who had been waiting, like himself, in the room adjoining. Lablache, on hearing his name called by the attendant, had caught up the first hat he could lay hands on, and ushered into the room he gesticulated so pathetically that he obtained all he asked for, not by having made the prince cry, as he intended, but by having made him laugh.

On one occasion an Italian dramatist hit upon what he thought a clever thing, by composing for Lablache the part of an absent-minded man. The upshot was that Lablache utterly failed to enact the part, 'I found it absolutely impossible,' he said to me one day, 'to enact myself. I felt more or less ashamed. Besides, how could I study that part. The moment I began to work at it, I ceased to be absent-minded. I had not an atom of the absent-minded man left in me; the moment I began to study, the object of my study disappeared.'

Rubini is the complement of Lablache, because he represents a totally different thing. A certain part of Italian art died also with Rubini. The grand

school of Crescentini, the grand school of *bravura*, of florid execution lost its last interpreter in him.

Among Italian tenors of the present time, a florid executant is almost a phenomenon ; they have no need of that kind of method. Modern Italian music, the music of Verdi for instance, only requires sound and feeling. Such was not the case in Rubini's time. A singer could no more do without a brilliant executive method than a pianist. Shakes and scales and flourishes were an essential part of the training of the throat as they are an essential part of the training of the pianist on the keyboard, and superior artists like Rubini not only considered them a means of imparting additional grace and ornament to song but a powerful means of expression. Some artists, Berlioz among them, condemned the art of vocalisation as incompatible with truth and genuine strength of feeling. But what, after all, is the method of Mozart, Beethoven and Weber in their compositions for the piano? Do they not go on electrifying you with their variations and shakes and scales? Take from the 'Concerto Stuck' or 'Sonate Pathétique' the brilliant writing and you take away at the same time half of their expressive power. Why then should that which is suitable in the case of a sonata, be unsuitable in the case of an aria? Why should that which is heart stirring under the fingers of a pianist be incapable of touching you from the lips of a singer? Provided he know how to impart to the

variations the character of the piece, provided the singer be as able an executant as the instrumentalist, it becomes virtually the same thing. Rubini had no difficulties whatever in that way. His voice, far more sweet than powerful, and not even always clear, had the pliancy of a snake and lent itself without an effort, without a forced note, without a contraction of the features to the boldest attempts of the greatest performers on the keyboard or with the bow. It was he who one day, at a rehearsal of 'Don Giovanni,' and during the opening bars of 'Il mio tesoro' leant towards the orchestra and said to the clarinettist who had just executed a brilliant variation, 'Monsieur, would you be good enough to lend me this?' And to the stupefaction of the prompter and amid frantic applause of band and public he introduced the variation at the end of his aria. No doubt, this was altering Mozart, but it was done in the very spirit of Mozart himself, and Rubini alone was capable of such a happy error. The tenors who came after him wanted to imitate him and only succeeded in producing a parody of him. That charming 'cellist Braga once told me that having paid a visit to Rubini at Bergamo after he had retired from the stage, he, (Braga), expressed some astonishment at the very touching effect he was said to have produced in the cavatina of the second act of 'Marino Faliero,' 'Un air à roulades,' 'A roulades,' replied Rubini with a smile, 'will you play the accompaniment?' And ten

minutes afterwards, Braga rose from the piano with tears in his eyes, applauding, and astounded at having heard those scales and shakes transform themselves on the lips of the singer into cries of rage and accents of despair. Here is a still more striking instance of the use of brilliant vocalisation.

In that celebrated 'challenge' duet in 'Tancredi,' Rubini's adversary was Bordogni, a finished musician and brilliant executant, but who lacked warmth. Bordogni, annoyed at last at being always vanquished in that duet by Rubini came to the conclusion one evening that he would also like to have his moment of victory; so, without giving his adversary the slightest warning he executed a series of variations, so brilliant and sustained as to rouse the house, a very unusual thing in Bordogni's case. Rubini simply looks at him, smiles and starts with a 'roulade à la Garcia'—that is, an improvised roulade, in which the scaling, the *grupetti*, the shakes succeed one another with such rapidity and for so long, that the public burst out laughing, astonished at a human chest containing such an ample provision of breath, at a human throat being able to produce so much musical pyrotechny. Let me add, that on that evening the public applauded the man of wit in the virtuoso, for that roulade was eminently suited to the occasion, seeing that it was as it were a retort; that bravura air was virtually 'an air of bravado,' that shock of vocal flourishes was

like the clashing of two swords; that duo of nightingales became a duel of proud and valiant knights.

Another remarkable fact. This matchless executant became the most touching, the most simple, the most emotional of singers in pieces demanding mere expression, because no artist knew how to shed tears to music like Rubini. It would seem that nature had created him expressly for that mournful, sentimental music that divides 'Otello' from the 'Trovatore,'—I am alluding to the music of Bellini. When the situation grew pathetic, Rubini became a great actor, and yet, if ever there was a mediocre actor, it was assuredly Rubini. Apathetic, cold, with common features and below the middle height, nay even awkward, he 'walked' through the successive phases of the piece with an indifference to gesture, to gait and to dress which at times became almost comical. I remember him, as it were yesterday in the 'Puritani' 'coming on' in such a curious wig as to rouse the laughter of the whole house. Without being in the least disconcerted he looks at the public with a smile on his face which meant almost plainly, 'I quite agree with you that they have put something very extraordinary on my head.' When his song is finished he disappears behind the wings, gets rid of the mirth-provoking wig, and returns to the stage, still smiling, but with his natural hair. Well, that self-same man in the finale of 'Lucia,' in the grand scene of 'La Somnambula,' in the third act of 'Il

Puritani,' became suddenly transformed into an admirable tragedian, in virtue of being a sublime singer. Very sparing of gestures, but strikingly true; with a sober play of the features, but which was the very pantomime of song, with a voice the very vibrations of which went straight to your heart and thrilled every nerve in your body, he made you quiver like an electric wire while listening to him. The spell he exercised over you was absolutely magnetic. I am enabled to cite a touching instance of this.

An old lady a friend of my family, having been stricken with mortal illness had been racked for more than four days with excruciating pains which positively tortured her. There seemed no possibility of alleviating her pain. All at once, in the midst of a terrible crisis, she exclaims; 'Go and fetch Rubini. Let him sing the air from 'Somnambula' in the next room and I feel certain that I'll get, at any rate, a few moments' relief.'

'Ah, monsieur,' said Rubini, when I told him the story, 'why did they not come and fetch me.' 'Because she could not have heard you if they had come. Two hours afterwards she was a corpse.'

This one fact is worth a dozen essays. It was, indeed, the golden age of Italian music. The artistic sky was studded at one and the same time with stars of different magnitude and luminous power; Cimarosa was declining, Rossini was in his zenith, Bellini was dawning on the horizon; and the rare gathering of

composers and interpreters had created a public, the analogy of which cannot be found in our opera houses of to-day.

For the Opéra of to-day counts a great number of subscribers, but what are they? Wealthy people. But whither do they go? To the boxes and orchestra stalls. At what time do they come? At any moment during the performance except at the beginning. Some subscribers have never heard the overture to 'Guillaume Tell.' What do they come for? To see and to be seen, to hear an act, to chat between the acts, to applaud a song or the *pas* of a *danseuse*; but how many among these stay from the first bar of an opera to the last?

At the Italian opera during the years 1829-31, there were between three and four score of men, of different ages and avocations, magistrates, authors, etc., who in the centre of the pit, just under the chandelier, had formed a phalanx of voluntary Romans whose first law was not to miss a single performance. Personally, I have seen 'Otello' sixty times. There was no privileged admission. One battled at the doors, if there happened to be a crowd; those who came first kept room for the others, we came an hour before the rise of the curtain and that period of waiting was spent in preparing for the performance. The oldest among us who had heard Garcia, Pellegrini, La Pasta compared them to the three great artists of our days, and told us of the char-

acteristic traits of their talent. A young magistrate who is at present a judge in the Court of Appeal, a capital musician, had noted on a little book the most brilliant passages of the great artists he had heard, and repeated them to us in a subdued voice. We were not only an auditorium, but a jury ; the public accepted our verdicts, followed our lead in the way of applause, imitated our silence ; the artists themselves included us in their calculations. The first time I met Lablache, he said to me ; ‘ Ah, monsieur, I know you well enough, second row of the pit, the sixth seat ; I have often sung to you.’ One evening, a new singer, having ventured upon a passage of questionable taste, the attempt was received with a ‘bravo’ from the back of the pit. Thereupon, one of the phalanx, of the name of Tillos, a fine young fellow with a proud mien, got up and turning to the spot whence the ‘bravo’ had come, said very loud and in a tone of indescribable contempt, ‘I have an idea that there is an habitué of the Opéra-Comique down there.’

Of course there was a little bit of madness, of exaggeration in all this ; nevertheless, it shows the enthusiasm, the passion for art which marks the period of 1830. And Berlioz is the living image of 1830 ; hence, the transition from Italian music to Berlioz who detested Italian music is quite natural. And now that his figure is placed in its proper frame, we shall be enabled to understand him better.

II

The first time I heard the name of Berlioz was in Rome at the French Musical Academy in the year 1832. He had just left the latter institution and was spoken of as an artist of talent, as a clever and intelligent man, but strange and taking a pride in being strange. People were inclined to look upon him as a *poseur*. Madame Vernet and her daughter defended him against that charge and were loud in his praise. Women have a quicker perception than we have with regard to superior men. One day, Mdlle. Louise Vernet sang to me an air composed for her by Berlioz during his stay among the mountains of Subiaco. It was entitled 'La Captive.' The poetry and sadness of it moved me deeply, and from that moment I felt a kind of mysterious bond of sympathy with that unknown man. I asked Mdlle. Vernet to give me a letter of introduction and on my return to Paris, I took immediate steps to find him, but failed. No one seemed to know anything about him. I had almost given up the thing when one morning at an Italian hairdresser's of the name of Decandia on the Place de la Bourse, I hear one of the assistants say to the principal, 'This stick belongs to M. Berlioz.' 'M. Berlioz,' I exclaim, turning to the hairdresser, 'you know M. Berlioz?' 'He is one of my best customers; I expect him here to-day.'

‘Well, give him this letter, please.’ It was Mdle. Vernet’s letter.

That same evening I went to hear the ‘Freischutz,’ and the house being crowded, I could only find standing room in the second gallery (upper boxes). All at once in the middle of the opening bars of *Gaspard’s* song, one of my neighbours rises from his seat and bending towards the orchestra shouts in a voice of thunder, ‘You don’t want two flutes there, you brutes, you want two piccolos. Two piccolos, do you hear. Oh, the brutes!’ Having said which, he simply sits down again, scowling indignantly. Amidst the general tumult provoked by this outburst I turn round and behold a young man trembling with passion, his hands clenched, his eyes flashing and a head of hair—such a head of hair. It looked like an immense umbrella of hair, projecting like a movable awning over a beak of a bird of prey. It was both comical and diabolical at the same time. Next morning there is a ring at my door, I happen to open it myself and the moment I catch sight of my visitor I exclaim,

‘Monsieur, were you not at the Opéra last night?’

‘Yes, monsieur.’

‘In the second gallery?’

‘Yes, monsieur.’

‘It was you who shouted, “You want two piccolos.”’

‘Of course I did. I have no patience with a set of brutes who do not know the difference between—’

‘Then you are M. Berlioz.’

‘I am Monsieur Berlioz, my dear Legouvé,’ thereupon we fell into one another’s arms as if we had known one another all our lives.

In fact, in a short time we were fast friends, for everything contributed to our intimacy. We were of the same age, we had, moreover in common, a passionate love for art. We both belonged to what Préault (the sculptor) called ‘the tribe of pathos mongers.’ Berlioz worshipped Shakspeare like myself, I worshipped Mozart as he did. When Berlioz was not composing music, he was reading poetry ; when I was not writing verse, I was playing. The last and strongest bond of all was that I had, out of sheer enthusiasm, translated ‘Romeo and Juliet,’ and that he was madly in love with the celebrated artist, Miss Smithson, who played Juliet. His love passion virtually set our friendship ablaze. First of all he scarcely knew a sentence of English, and Miss Smithson was even more ignorant of our language than he was of hers ; a fact which made their conversation rather awkward, not to say comical. Secondly, she was more or less afraid of her savage admirer. Lastly, Berlioz’ father strenuously opposed all idea of marriage. All this was enough and more than enough to create the demand for a confidant, and he raised me to the dignity of counsellor in ordinary. But as it was a function entailing a great deal of application and which might well have sufficed for two people he

gave me a coadjutor in the shape of a supplementary confessor, namely, my friend Eugène Sue for whom he had a great admiration.

Our consultations partook of a strange character indeed and an accident which had happened to Miss Smithson, (she had sprained her ankle while getting out of a cab) gave rise one day to a very characteristic conversation. On that morning Berlioz had sent me a note in a short cramped handwriting. It ran as follows—

‘I wish to see you most urgently. Send word to Sue. Oh, my friends, the agony of it.’

Thereupon I send a note to Sue.—

‘A wild hurricane is blowing. Berlioz has summoned us to appear. To-night, at supper, at my place at midnight.’

At the time appointed, Berlioz makes his appearance, his eyes beclouded with tears, his hair drooping over his forehead like a weeping willow and uttering sighs which he seemed to draw from his boots.

‘Well, what is the matter?’ we asked.

‘Oh my friends, life has become impossible to me.’

‘Is your father as relentless as ever.’

‘My father,’ shouts Berlioz at the top of his voice and trembling with rage, ‘My father says “Yes.” He wrote to me to that effect this morning.’

‘Well, then it seems to us. . .’

‘Wait, wait, do not interrupt me. The receipt of this letter drives me frantic with joy. I rush to her

place, I enter her room, almost out of my senses and dissolved in tears. I exclaim, "My father consents, my father consents." And would you know her answer? Well, she said very calmly, "Not yet, Hector; not yet. My foot hurts me too much." What do you say to that?'

'What we say is this, that the poor girl was no doubt in great pain.'

'In great pain?' he replied. 'Is there such a thing as great pain with people who are in ecstasies. Look at me, well, if some one had plunged a knife into my breast at the moment she told me she loved me I should not have felt it. She on the other hand . . . she could . . . and did . . . and dared . . . ' Then suddenly interrupting himself. 'How could she have dared? . . . I am simply wondering that she was not afraid of my strangling her.' The sentence was uttered with such simplicity and conviction that Eugène Sue and I burst out laughing. Berlioz stared at us absolutely stupified. He was under the impression of having said the most commonplace thing possible and we had the greatest difficulty in bringing home to his mind that there was not the slightest connection of ideas between a woman who complains of being in pain with a swollen ankle and a woman who is being strangled; and that Miss Smithson would have been utterly surprised at her admirer clutching her by the throat in the manner Othello does. The poor fellow listened

to us without grasping a word of what we said, he hung his head and the tears ran down his cheeks. Then he said at last, 'I don't care for what you say, she does not care for me, she does not care for me.'

'She does not love you in the same way you love her,' replied Sue; 'that's evident enough, and moreover, very fortunate, for two people who loved as you do would lead a very strange life together.' Berlioz could not help smiling. Then I chimed in, 'My dear friend, you are thinking of the Portia of Shakespeare who strikes herself in the thigh to induce Brutus to give her his confidence. But Miss Smithson does not play the Portias; she plays the Ophelias, the Desdemonas and the Juliets, that is, weak, loving, tender-hearted and timid creatures, women who are essentially womanly, and I feel certain that her character is like the parts she plays.'

'That's true,' he said.

'That her soul is as delicately attuned as those of the characters she represents.'

'Yes, that's true, delicate is the only word for it.'

'And if you had wished to remain worthy of her, or rather of yourself, instead of flinging this joy in her face, you would have applied it like a balm to her wound. Your divine Shakespeare would not have failed to do so if he had had to write that scene.'

'You are right, you are right,' exclaimed the poor

fellow when I had finished speaking. 'I am a brutal lout, I am a savage. I do not deserve to be loved by such a heart. If you only knew what a fund of affection there is stored in that heart. Oh, how I will implore her pardon to-morrow. But, after all, my dear friends, see how well advised I was to consult you. I came here in despair, exasperated, and now I feel happy, confident and wishing to laugh outright.'

And all at once with the simplicity, with the quickly changing emotion of a child he began to enlarge upon the joy of his coming marriage. Seeing which way the wind blew, I remarked—'Well, let us celebrate the marriage at once; let us have some music.'

He acquiesced enthusiastically. But how could we have music, seeing that there was no piano in my bachelor quarters. If there had been, it would have been of no use, seeing that Berlioz could only play with one finger. Fortunately we had a guitar and to him the guitar made up all the instruments in one. He played it very well, so he caught it up and began to sing. What? Boleros, dance tunes, songs? Not at all. Simply the finale of the second act of 'La Vestale.' He sang the music of the grand-priest of the vestals, of Julia, he sang everything, all the parts one after the other. Unfortunately, he had not a scrap of voice, but it did not matter much, he made himself one. By means of that system of singing

with one's mouth closed, which he practised with extraordinary ability ; thanks also to the passion and musical genius which animated him body and soul, he managed to draw from his chest, throat and guitar combined sounds, such as no mortal had ever heard before ; piercing wails interlarded here and there with adjectives of admiration, short pauses to work off his enthusiasm, nay eloquent comments ; the whole producing so wonderful an effect, so strange a whirlwind of passion and 'headlong dash' that no performance of that same masterpiece even at the Conservatoire ever moved or carried me beyond myself to the extent of this singer without a voice and with a mere guitar. After 'La Vestale' came a passage or two from his 'Symphonie Fantastique,' which was his first creation and had been performed in public only once. I had written both on the composer and on the work an article full of enthusiastic hope.

Finally and under the influence of all this music, as if carried away by it, we began to build plans for the future. Eugène Sue told us the subject of his novels, I unfolded my dramatic projects, Berlioz his dreams of operas. We cudgelled our brains for subjects for the same, we built him a scenario for 'The Brigands' of Schiller about which he raved, and we parted at four in the morning, intoxicated with poetry and music, trembling with the fine frenzy for art. A few hours later Miss Smithson

beheld, beaming with joy and quaking with repentance, the strange being who had rushed from her room, the previous day, fuming with rage and cast down with despair.

III

If I have dwelt at some length on this scene of my youth, it was not merely for the sake of reviving a reminiscence which touches me deeply. It was, above all, because it represents to the life the real Berlioz whom I would like to portray. It is because, while writing these lines, I still seem to see that pathetic, extravagant, simple-minded, violent, sensitive and unreasoning creature who was above all things sincere. He was accused of 'posing' But 'to pose' is to hide what is and to affect what is not, it means 'to sham,' 'to calculate,' it means the absolute control of self. And where in the name of all that is rational could he have found the strength to enact such a part, that creature who was virtually the slave of his impressions, who passed from one feeling to another without transition, who grew pale and quivered and wept in spite of himself, who could no more command his words than the muscles of his face? To accuse him of 'posing' is tantamount to accusing him of being envious. I admit that he was a great admirer of his own works but he was also very enthusiastic about the works of others. We have only to take

up his admirable articles on Beethoven, on Weber, on Mozart, and in order to prevent 'envy' itself saying that he crushed the living beneath his eulogies of the dead, we may be allowed to recall the shouts of admiration with which he hailed 'Le Désert' of Félicien David and the 'Sapho' of Gounod.

Unfortunately his dislikes were as strong as his likes. He could no more hide the former than the latter. Side by side with the flaming praises with which he hailed the thing he liked, went the barbed arrows, the pitiless sarcasms with which he pursued the thing he did not like. Two curious facts will show those two sides of his character.

One evening I had invited some friends among others, Liszt, Goubaux*, Schoelcher,† Sue. Of course Berlioz was of the party. 'Liszt, you might play us a sonata of Beethoven' he said. From my study, we went into the drawing-room, for by that time I had a drawing-room and a piano. There were no lights, and the fire in the grate had burned very low. Goubaux brings the lamp from my study, while Liszt walks to the piano and each one looks out

* Prosper Goubaux is best known by his 'Trente Ans ou la Vie d'un Joueur' which he wrote for Frédéric Lemaître and for a wager, to prove in addition to other things that a most interesting play might be written with virtually one character in it—what we term a one-part play. The late M. Fechter played a version of it at the Lyceum.

† M. Vict. Schoelcher though very old, is alive still and a member of the Senate. He is best known by his uncompromising Republicanism and sincere Atheism.—TR.

for a seat to make himself comfortable. 'Turn up the wick,' I say to Goubaux; 'we can't see a bit.' Instead of which he turns it down, and we are absolutely in the dark, I might say, in a dense gloom, and this sudden change from light to darkness emphasised by the first notes of the piano has the effect of moving all of us very deeply. It was like the scene of the *tenebrae* from 'Mosé.' Liszt, whether by sheer accident or from unconscious influence, begins the mournful and heartrending andante of the sonata in C sharp. Everyone remains as if rooted to the spot where he happens to be at that self-same moment, and does not attempt to stir. Now and then the expiring embers pierce through their ashes and throw strange, lurid and fitful gleams into the room and invest us with weird, uncouth shapes. I had dropped into an armchair, while above my head I heard stifled cries and sobs. It was Berlioz trying to master his emotion. At the termination of the piece we remained absolutely mute for a moment or so; then Goubaux lights a candle and while we are passing from the drawing-room into the study, Liszt lays his hand on my arm and stops, and points to Berlioz with the tears streaming down his cheeks.

'Look at him,' says Liszt in a low voice, 'he has been listening to this as the "heir presumptive" to Beethoven.'

That was the enthusiastic Berlioz, now for the

other. One evening we were together at the Opéra Italien at a performance of 'Otello.' In the finale of the second act there is a celebrated passage in which Desdemona throws herself at her father's feet and exclaims—

'Se il padre m'abbandona,
Che mai più mi resterà?'

('If my father abandons me, what then will remain to me?')

The first line is repeated twice and expresses Desdemona's sorrow by a musical phrase, slow, full of feeling and very affecting. Then, all at once, when we get to the second line and in order to convey Desdemona's despair, there is a perfect burst of trills, shakes and scales which carried me with them, but had the effect of exasperating Berlioz. No sooner has the curtain fallen upon the second act than he leans over me and in a very pathetic voice like the melody itself, sings to me softly,

'Si mon père m'abandonne,
Si mon père m'abandonne.'

Then, breaking into sardonic laughter and reproducing all the roulades of the text, he went on—

'Je m'en fiche pas mal !
Je m'en fiche pas mal !
Je m'en fiche pas mal !'
('I don't care a straw.')

These are the two Berliozes, the enthusiast and the scoffer. Here is a third, showing, perhaps, the most

characteristic trait of that strange figure. I am alluding to the immense and curious part the love passion has played in his life.

The reader may or may not remember that admirable passage of his works in which he has portrayed his first passion (he was only twelve years old) for a young girl of eighteen whom he calls Estelle.

‘She had a tall and elegant figure, large black eyes, ready for attack and defence, albeit that they were always dancing with mirth, and a head of hair fit to adorn the helmet of Achilles. The sight of her sent an electric shock through me; I loved her, and that sums up the whole affair in one word. My brain was reeling and do what I would, I could not shake off the sensation. I hoped for nothing, I was ignorant of everything, but I felt an agonising pain at my heart. In the daytime I hid myself in the maize fields, in the secret nooks of my grandfather’s orchard, like a wounded bird, mute and racked with suffering. Jealousy, that pale companion of the purest love tortured me at the slightest word addressed to my idol by a man, and everyone in the neighbourhood made merry over the poor child, whose body and soul were shattered to atoms by a love beyond his strength.’

Well, what Berlioz was at twelve, he remained to the end. Always wounded, always suffering, though not always dumb. One may easily imagine that

such a temperament did not lend itself easily to the humdrum existence of home-life or to conjugal fidelity ; consequently, his marriage with Miss Smithson was not unlike the Pastoral Symphony which opens with the most delightful spring morning and winds up with the most terrible hurricane. Discord came in a remarkably short time and in a rather singular form. When Berlioz married Miss Smithson, he was madly in love with her ; but she herself, to use a term which drove him frantic with rage, 'only liked him well enough.' It was a kind of 'namby-pamby' affection. Gradually, however, their common existence familiarised her with the savage transports of her lion, the charm of which began to tell upon her ; in short, in a little while, the originality of her partner's mind, the magnetic spell of his imagination, the magnetic influence of his heart won upon his apathetic companion to a degree such as to transform her into a most affectionate wife ; tender regard changed into love, love into passion, and passion into jealousy. Unfortunately it often happens that man and wife are like the plates of a pair of scales, they rarely keep balanced ; when the one goes up, the other goes down. Such was the case with the newly married couple. While the Smithson thermometer rose, the Berlioz thermometer fell. His feelings changed into a sterling, correct and placid friendship, while at the same time his wife became imperiously exacting and indulged in violent

recrimination, unfortunately but too justified. Berlioz, mixed up with the whole of the theatrical world in virtue of his position as a musical critic and a composer, was exposed to temptations to which stronger minds than his would have yielded. In addition to this, his very title of struggling genius gave him a prestige which easily changed his interpreters into perhaps 'too sympathetic' comforters. Madame Berlioz became too apt to look in her husband's articles for the traces of her husband's infidelity; she even looked for them elsewhere, and fragments of intercepted letters, drawers indiscreetly opened provided her with incomplete revelations, which sufficed to put her beside herself but only partly enlightened her. Her jealousy invariably came too late to prevent the mischief. Berlioz' heart went so quickly to work that she had great difficulty in keeping up with it; when by dint of researches she had come upon the object of her husband's passion, that passion had already been transferred to another, and in that case his actual innocence became easy of proof. The poor woman got bewildered like a sleuthhound who, after having followed a track for half-an-hour or so gets to the nest when the bird has flown. Truly, a fresh discovery invariably made her start upon another track, hence some terrible scenes. Miss Smithson was already too old for Berlioz when he married her; sorrow in her case accelerated the ravages of

time; she grew visibly older day by day instead of year by year, and unfortunately, the older she grew in features, the younger she grew at heart, the more intense became her love and also the more bitter she herself became, until it was torture to him and to her, to such a degree, in fact, that one night their young child, awakened by a terrible outburst of indignation and temper on the part of his mother, jumped out of his bed and, running up to her, exclaimed—‘Mamma, mamma, don’t do like Madame Lafarge.’

A separation became inevitable. She who had been Miss Smithson, grown old and ungainly before her time, and ill besides, retired to an humble lodging at Montmartre, where Berlioz, notwithstanding his poverty, faithfully and decently provided for her. He went to see her as a friend, for he never ceased to love her, he loved her as much as ever; but he loved her differently and that difference had produced a chasm between them.* Then began for Berlioz the second and more painful period of his life. He struggled against everything and everybody; he struggled against the public, he struggled for his daily existence, he struggled against the difficulties of a false position; he struggled against his own genius which was still feeling its way. From that moment also dates the second phase of our friendship, which underwent a transformation without

* Miss Smithson originally come over to Paris with Macready.—TR.

being weakened. This friendship made him a veritable initiator to me, and it now enables me to show that extraordinary intellect in a new and curious light.

IV

An important event from my point of view had modified our relations. Like Berlioz I also got married and pretty well under the same circumstances and prompted by the same feelings, but I understood marriage in a different way. My new condition of life created for me what Dante eloquently calls *vita nuova*, a new life. My children, their mother, the care of their education had made me a family man (*a domestic man*), as the English say. That kind of thing did not at all agree with Berlioz' disposition and one day I said to him laughing—

‘My dear friend, you are like Mdlle. Mars.’

‘I don't understand.’

‘Well, when they offered her to play a mother's part she invariably refused, saying, “I am only fit to play young parts”; and she was right. When her certificate of birth pointed to her being sixty, her talent was as fresh as that of a woman of thirty. Her eyes, her face, her voice could only depict love. When asked in court how old she was, she answered very cleverly—‘I am over twenty-nine.’

‘But what the deuce, my friend, have I in common with Mdlle. Mars?’ asked Berlioz.

‘You have this in common with her that you are only fit to play the young parts. You are sentenced to love’s servitude for life. You’ll never be older than we were at the beginning of our acquaintance when we were five-and-twenty, and what is worse, the date was 1830, which is a very aggravating circumstance. You are an everlasting Desgrieux, a Desgrieux who often changes his Manon. I have taken to the parts like Tiberge’s.’

Our affection, though it had become of a more serious nature remained as cordial as ever, and established between him and me—I ought to say between him and us—musical relations which greatly helped me in my education. Sure to find a piano and an interpreter at my house, he came to talk with us of Beethoven, of Glück, of himself. I have in my possession and it is lying before me as I write, a copy of the French version of ‘Alceste,’ covered with marginal notes and directions in Berlioz’ handwriting. Glück corrected his proofs very badly; Berlioz corrected them afresh on this copy from the Italian edition, which is well known as the first edition. And whatever he corrected, he asked the mistress of the home to sing to him. Then, in addition to the purely material corrections, he gave her most artistic hints. He entered into and initiated us in all the mysteries of the composer’s intentions, in all the *nuances* of accentuation and pronunciation and in a way which plainly showed us Glück’s

ideas. In short he, and perhaps he only, was able to change a mere amateur into a thorough artist.

Still more poetical was Berlioz when explaining choral symphonies. Even his articles, admirable as they are, only convey an imperfect idea of that poetry, for in these articles there is only his opinion—in his spoken criticism the whole of the man stood revealed. To the eloquence of his words there was added the eloquence of his face, of his accent, his tears, his gestures, his enthusiastic exclamations, his boldness of imagery which compelled the undivided attention both of the listener's eyes and ears. And the quivering of the features responded to the tremor of the voice. I learned more on the subject of instrumental music in an hour spent in that manner than at a concert at the Conservatoire ; or, to be correct, when I got to the Conservatoire on the following Sunday, the mind still full of the comments of Berlioz, the work of Beethoven opened to me like an immense temple flooded with light. I was enabled to take in at one glance the details of its organisation ; I felt myself walking on familiar ground, I went through its windings with sure-footed step. Berlioz had given me the key of the sanctuary, and this is not the only joy of my musical life I owe to him.

One evening he called. 'I want you to come with me,' he said. 'I am going to show you something you have never seen before and some-

one, the recollection of whom you will never forget.' Away we go to a small hotel where on the second floor I find myself face to face with a pale, sad-looking young man, very elegant in appearance and with a slight foreign accent, with brown limpid eyes inexpressibly sweet in their expression, auburn hair, almost as long as that of Berlioz and like his, drooping in a sheaf, rather than in locks on his forehead.

'My dear Chopin, allow me to introduce my friend, Legouv  .' It was, in fact, Chopin who had arrived in Paris but a few days previously. My first glimpse of him had stirred me to my very soul; his music haunted me like something beyond mortal's ken. I cannot define Chopin better than as 'a charming trinity.' Between his personality, his playing and his work there was such a thorough harmony, that it seems to me, one could no more have divided them than the features of the same face. The very peculiar sound he drew from his instrument was like the look from his eyes; the somewhat 'valetudinarian' delicacy of the features was in perfect accord with the poetical melancholy of his nocturnes, and the refined care bestowed upon his dress made one understand the distinctly aristocratic elegance of certain parts of his work; upon me he produced the effect of a natural son of Weber and of some duchess; what I called his three *egos* constituted but one.

His genius did not stir within him before one in the morning; until then he was only a charming pianist. But when midnight came he entered into the group of ærial spirits, of winged beings, of all that flits and sparkles amidst the semi-gloom of a midsummer night. At such moments he wanted a very restricted and very select auditorium; any face in the least degree unpleasant was sufficient to disconcert him. One day when his playing seemed to me somewhat agitated, I distinctly remember him saying to me in a low voice while pointing with a look to a lady seated opposite to him, 'It is the feather of that lady. If that feather does not go away, I shall not be able to go on.' When once he sat down to the piano, he played until he was exhausted. Undermined by a disease from which there is no escape, his eyes became set round with black rings, his looks became hectic, his lips became blood-red, his breath became short and laboured. He felt and we felt that some part of his life oozed away with every sound, and yet, he would not stop and we had not the strength to stop him; the fever that consumed him took also hold of us. Nevertheless, there was an infallible means of dragging him away from the piano—namely, to ask him to play the funeral march he composed after the disasters in Poland. He never refused to play it, but the moment he had finished, he took his hat and went away. That piece which was like the

swan song of his country, affected him too painfully; after that he grew virtually dumb, for this great artist was also a great patriot, and the defiant notes which startle one in his mazurkas like so many clarion sounds testify to the heroism hidden behind that pale face which never lost its juvenile look. Chopin died at forty, virtually no older than a mere youth. As a final trait to his portrait let us add a somewhat comical finesse which left no doubt as to his breeding. I am not likely to forget his answer after the only public concert he ever gave. He had asked me to give an account of it, but Liszt claimed the honour. I quickly went to Chopin to tell him the good news. 'I should have preferred you to do it,' he said very sweetly.

'You are jesting, my dear Chopin. An article by Liszt! It is a positive piece of luck both for the public and for you. You may safely trust to his great admiration for your talent. I feel certain that he will map you out a magnificent kingdom.'

'Yes,' he answered, smiling, 'a magnificent kingdom within his empire.'

Liszt himself, whom Chopin mistrusted without cause—for he wrote a delightfully sympathetic article on that concert—would have never become an intimate acquaintance—I might almost say, a friend of mine but for my friendship with Berlioz. But the greatest good I derived from that friendship was the opportunity it afforded me of fathoming the secret of

Berlioz's character and genius, and of being able to-day to explain and to defend both. Let us be frank, Berlioz is admired and applauded, but he is not liked. The fierce glare of his glory as an artist has not shed a halo round the man; he is misjudged in the latter capacity and imperfectly known in the former. Illustrious as he is; he has virtually remained a sphinx; let us try to solve the enigma.

Berlioz has been reproached with three things. As a composer he is charged with too much science, that is, of having more technical knowledge than inspiration, of sacrificing too much to description, of aiming before all things at the imitation of natural sounds; as a man he is accused of being an egotist, and as a critic of being spiteful.

Three hours of careful observation during one evening convinced me that he was not sufficiently scientific, that his music was above all psychological, and that the spiteful creature had, if anything, too big a heart. The reader will admit that this was a well-spent evening.

It happened in this way: his 'Damnation de Faust' had just been 'scored' for piano, when one morning he said to me,

'I'll be with you to-morrow evening at eight. I'll bring my score and my pianist who is but twelve years old; he is a prodigy who one day will be a marvel; his name is Théodore Ritter.'

Next evening at the appointed hour Ritter was seated at the piano ; Berlioz takes a seat beside him, frequently interrupting him or making him repeat a passage in order to explain his intention with regard to it, or to tell me the meaning of this or that movement, of this or that note, and as I listened to him the dual aim he has always pursued, the two contradictory objects he always had in view appeared clearly to me—namely, grandeur in *ensemble* and minuteness in detail, Michael Angelo and Meissonnier combined. I am free to admit that my brain was reeling at the mere thought of what he wanted to convey by means of music, not only in the domain of visible and outward nature, but above all in the much more mysterious domain of the soul. Our deepest emotions, our most secret feelings or most transient sensations, Berlioz considered them susceptible of being translated into the language of sounds. He wanted his music to be the echo of the thousand and one vibrations of his quickly moving heart. No doubt, it was a noble ambition, but I am afraid, beyond his artistic strength. The family of great artists may be divided into two classes ; on one side the simple, clear and luminous geniuses, such as Haydn, Mozart, Rossini and, to come down to our own days, Gounod. On the other side, the complex and tangled geniuses, such as Beethoven, Meyerbeer and, facing them, Berlioz. The creators belonging to the latter category require perhaps,

more than the others, a very vast science; their multiplicity of ideas, their power of conception, the mysterious depths of their aspirations require a technical proficiency, and a pliancy of execution which in their turn require an amount of labour which not the most highly gifted nature can replace by mere inspiration. When we consider the immense labour to which Meyerbeer condemned himself, when we look at the solid education with which he started, the terrible discipline he imposed upon himself, the consecutive studies he undertook of the German and Italian masters of vocal and instrumental music, the indefatigable research by means of which he made himself acquainted with all the mechanical and industrial inventions bearing upon musical art, the obstinate pursuit by which he arrived at the knowledge of every combination of melody or orchestration invented by every artist of every country, when we consider all this, we soon become aware that his powerful faculty for producing contrasts and effects was, after all, the result of prodigious effort; we begin to understand at what cost he was enabled to add an octave to the gamut of dramatic music. Well, this was the very thing Bérlioz lacked. Through his father's opposition he began his musical studies too late. His poverty prevented him from pursuing them thoroughly. Instead of being able to work, he was obliged to sing in the chorus and to give lessons on the guitar

in order to live; he was unable to acquire *sufficient talent for his genius*; hence, we find in his works side by side with the most ingenious and delicate attempts at execution, instances of awkwardness, want of clearness, lapses and odd devices which are simply so many blunders. No doubt he was as skilful as nearly all the others, but he was not sufficiently skilful for himself. The talent for execution in the artist must be in accordance with the nature and abundance of his conceptions. Lamartine's pen, rich as it was, would not have sufficed for the imagination of Victor Hugo. It was only by sheer hard work that La Fontaine could create for himself that marvellous instrument which lent itself to the expression of the thousand and one subtleties of his brain. Berlioz, in order to be altogether adequate to himself ought to have had the science and capacities of Beethoven. There is comfort in the fact of Weber himself complaining of not being sufficiently scientific. The 'Freischutz' remains, nevertheless, an immortal work and so does 'La Damnation de Faust.'

Finally, we come to the two terrible epithets that have been coupled with Berlioz' name; that of egotist as a man: that of spitefulness as a critic.

Let us examine for a moment in how far these reproaches are true. No doubt, he was very self-concerned, nevertheless he found time, and I speak from experience, to occupy himself zealously with

the affairs of others, to take an interest in everything that interested his friends, to be deeply moved by their sorrows, to associate himself with their joys ; he was the most grateful of men, and if he sometimes remembered the harm done to him, he always remembered the good. Hetzel (the publisher) and I, had the opportunity of rendering him a small favour. He has recorded it in golden letters in his memoirs as if it had been some noble deed, and given us in thanks a hundred per cent. for our money, as if he had never repaid the capital. On one occasion his gratitude became sheer heroism. In 1848, M. Charles Blanc, entrusted with the direction of ' Fine Arts ' at the Ministry of Public Education, bestowed upon Berlioz through the intermediary of the Ministry a mark of sympathy and esteem. Twenty years after, twenty years during which the protégé and the protector scarcely ever met, M. Charles Blanc standing as a candidate for an unattached Membership of the Academy calls upon Berlioz who is dying.

' I know the reason of your visit,' says Berlioz.

' Never mind the reason of my visit,' replies the candidate quickly. I had no idea that you were ill. Don't let us speak of my affairs, and let me call another day.'

' On the contrary, I want you to remain and talk them over. I shall go to the Academy.'

' What, in your present state of health, my dear

Berlioz. Allow me to tell you that I forbid you to do so.'

'Yes, I am very ill, my days are numbered ; my doctor has told me so, he has even told me their number,' he added with a smile ; 'but the election, if I am not mistaken, takes place on the 16th. So there is plenty of time. I shall even have a few days to prepare myself,' he went on in that tone of banter of which he could rarely divest himself. A week later, the election took place. Berlioz was carried into the place and a fortnight afterwards he was dead.

In his pitying love for animals he often drifted into sentimentality. I remember a dinner party at which one of the guests described minutely an incident connected with sport. Berlioz put down his knife and fork, turned away his head and trembling violently, said : 'This is cruel and cowardly. I cannot understand men like yourself talking gaily about bringing down birds and watching their life's blood oozing out of them, talking about animals wounded and writhing in agony at your feet, of living creatures, crushed beneath your heels or finally dispatched with the butt end of your guns. . . . You are simply a set of executioners.'

His emotion almost got the better of him while he was speaking and as I watched him, I could not help recalling those two lines of *La Fontaine*—

' Les animaux périr :
Baucis en répandit en secret quelques larmes.'

I am afraid I failed to reconcile the idea of spitefulness with *a man* who reminded me of Baucis.

Now let us look at the critic. I am bound to admit that the critic was rough, at times even bitter and unjust. I have no intention to exonerate him, I only wish to explain. First of all, his temper had been soured in the struggle and by injustice done to himself. His most virulent attacks are often so many reprisals. His occupation as a critic was, moreover, unbearable to him ; he had only taken to it as a last resource, and whenever he took up his pen, he felt sullen and wroth like the convict who takes up his chain. Even the money he earned that way was distasteful to him, his pride as a composer revolted at the thought of his articles bringing him more than his compositions. Let us add that he was violently exclusive like all innovators, like Beethoven who wished to see Rossini whipped, like Michael-Angelo who spoke with scorn of Raphael, like Corneille who disputed Racine's claim to dramatic talent. Jealousy has nothing to do with such denials of justice ; they are the antipathies of genius which are only a proof of genius ; the more original the intellect, the more unjust it becomes at times in its utterances ; if Rössini, Auber and Hérold had written what they thought of Berlioz, they would have said a great deal more against him than he did against them. Finally, Berlioz possessed a gift which very quickly

becomes a defect: he was terribly witty. The moment he took up his pen, the amusing traits of satire and raillery flowed so freely as to make him roar with laughter while he was penning them, but his raillery in spite of its being mere exuberance of mirth was none the less to be avoided and feared. Very few people felt at home with him. The most eminent artists, his equals in every respect, felt more or less uncomfortable in his presence. Gounod has often told me of the cramping influence Berlioz exercised over him. One morning at my own house I saw Adolphe Nourrit thrown into a state of confusion on Berlioz entering the room. A melody by Schubert which he had begun in a masterly way, was finished in a lukewarm way as if he had been a mere beginner. Berlioz never dreamed of evoking such feelings in others, if he had suspected such a thing, he would have been the first to suffer, for his irony dropped from him like a shell before the fear of causing distress to even the most obscure individual.

A pianist whose name I forget, if ever I knew it, and the inventor of some method of tuition of which I am equally ignorant, went to see Berlioz and asked him for an article. Berlioz was about to show him the door somewhat brutally, but the pianist would not take No for an answer.

‘Test my method, Monsieur Berlioz,’ he said.

‘Very well, seeing that you insist upon it, I’ll send

you a boy who wants to be a pianist in spite of me, in spite of his parents, in spite of music itself. If you succeed with him I'll write you an article.'

Whom does he send? He sends Ritter, strenuously recommending him to hide his talent, not to afford the inventor a glimpse of it at any cost. After two or three lessons he runs against the latter—of course by accident.

'Well, what do you think of your pupil?' he asks.

'He is very dense, and his fingers seem made of lead; still I won't give in.'

In about a week Berlioz meets the inventor once more.

'Well?' is the question.

'He is getting on, he is getting on.'

'Oh, indeed. I'll come and hear what he can do to-morrow.'

Next morning Berlioz makes his appearance and says in a whisper to Ritter: 'Do your very best.'

Ritter starts playing and does as he is told to the intense stupefaction of the professor, who sits rooted to his chair while Berlioz roars with laughter in his diabolical joy at the discomfiture of the poor man, to whom he shouts: 'It's Ritter, it's Ritter.'

Almost choking with tears, his arms dropping by his side, the poor wretch has scarcely strength enough to say—

'How could you possibly make such cruel sport of a poor fellow who only asked you to help him

to earn his livelihood.' And the 'poor fellow' sinks back in his chair, the tears coursing down his cheeks.

Thereupon Berlioz throws his arms round his neck and apologises for the trick he has played him. Next morning there is an admirable article in his paper.

Here you have the man ; a biting pen and a soft heart.

V

When writing about Berlioz one is always compelled to come back to the love-passion, because it was the alpha and omega of his life. Fate ordained that I should be his last confidant as I had been his first. No matter how long and how often the business of life kept us apart, the moment we came together again his confessions were renewed just as if we had only parted the night before. I immediately resumed my part, and the first square or doorway or shaded nook was immediately transformed into a confessional.

Here are three tales of passionate love which he told me within a few years of one another. They will complete his portrait in a more effective manner than any number of pages of personal appreciation.

One day, being caught in a spring shower in the Rue Vivienne, I took shelter under the colonnade in front of the Palais-Royal Theatre and on turning

round I beheld Berlioz by my side. He puts his arm in mine and with despondent looks and jerky voice he begins to stride up and down. All at once he stops and faces me.

‘My dear Legouvé,’ he says, ‘there are people in hell who have deserved their fate less than I have.’

Accustomed as I was to these kind of outbursts, I was, nevertheless, startled.

‘Great heavens, what is the matter?’

‘You know that my poor wife is living in humble lodgings at Montmartre.’

‘Whither you often go to see her, I also know that, and where your anxious care and respect for her have made her as comfortable as possible under the circumstances.’

‘There is not much credit due to me for that,’ he replies quickly. ‘A man would indeed be a monster if he did not love and respect such a woman as that.’ Then with indescribable bitterness, he adds, ‘Well, I am a monster.’

‘Another case of your conscience pricking you?’

‘Judge for yourself. I am not living by myself.’

‘I know it.’

‘Someone else has taken her place. It’s of no use, I am as weak as a child. Well, a few days ago, there was a ring at my wife’s door. She opens it herself and finds herself face to face with a young and elegant woman, who with a smile on her lips,

says to her: "Madame Berlioz, if you please, madame."—"I am Madame Berlioz," replies my wife.—"You are mistaken," says the other one, "I am asking for Madame Berlioz"—"I am Madame Berlioz."—"No you are not Madame Berlioz; you mean old Madame Berlioz, the deserted Madame Berlioz, and I am talking of the young and pretty and tenderly beloved one. That Madame Berlioz stands before you." Saying which she makes her exit, slamming the door on the poor creature who sinks to the ground, almost swooning with grief.'

Thereupon he stopped, then after a short pause went on, 'Isn't it simply atrocious and wasn't I right in saying that. . . .'

'Who told you of that abominable act? I exclaimed excitedly. 'No doubt she who performed it. I feel certain she boasted of it. And do you mean to tell me that you did not turn her out after that?'

'I could not have done it,' he said in a broken voice, 'I love her.' His own tone prevented my answering him and the rest of his story pained me still more by showing me that his wife was fully avenged. She who had taken her place had a pretty but very weak voice and was bitten with the mania to sing on the stage. Well, Berlioz had to use his influence as a critic to get her an engagement; that honest, inflexible, fierce pen had to 'tone down,' to conciliate managers and authors in order to

procure for her a part in which to make her first appearance. She was abominably hissed ; and he was compelled to write an article in which the failure was transformed into a success. Finding the stage barred to her, she insisted on singing at the concerts organised by Berlioz, and of all things, his music, his melodies. And he had to yield once more ; he, whom a wrong note drove positively frantic, he, to whom a movement taken 'in wrong time' was positive torture, he had to consent to have his own works murdered and to preside as conductor at the assassination of the composer.

'Well,' he said, after having enumerated his tortures, 'is not all this diabolical enough, I mean both tragic and grotesque at the same time ? I say that I deserve to go to hell, but I am virtually already in it. And that terrible mocker, Méphistofeles is, I daresay, laughing at seeing me assailed in my weakest part, my nerves as a musician. Truly, I feel tempted to laugh at it myself every now and then.'

And, in fact, while his eyes were suffused with tears of anger, his features were convulsed with an indescribable mocking, bitter scowl.

My second story is still more characteristic and will bring us a step nearer to the intimate knowledge of that strange being, for the love-passion with him assumed so many shapes, that every fresh access revealed something hitherto unknown.

The dominant faculty in Berlioz was the faculty for

suffering. Every one of his sensations was finally reduced to pain. Pleasure itself with him verged upon pain. What was his first feeling when his first passion laid hold of his heart? He himself has recorded it. 'I felt my heart racked with intense suffering.' The reader may remember his answer to someone sitting next to him in the theatre who, noticing his sobbing during the performance of one of Beethoven's symphonies, said kindly, 'You seem to be greatly affected, monsieur. Had not you better retire for a while?'

'Are you under the impression that I am here to enjoy myself?' replied Berlioz brusquely.

I had often noticed that fatal tendency in him; I contended that one could not touch him without making him cry, and now and then I called him in banter, 'My dear sore child.'

It was, I believe, in the autumn of '65 that the rehearsals of his opera '*Béatrice et Bénédict*,'* took him to Baden where I happened to be at that moment. One morning I came upon him in the forest that leads to the old Schlosz. He appeared to me very old, changed and sad. We sat down on a seat, for the uphill walk had tired him. He had in his hand a letter which every now and then he kneaded into a ball, his fingers twitching all the while.

* Founded on '*Much Ado about Nothing*.' The opera though exceedingly scholarly and even melodious is rarely performed in France, but it was revived within the last two years in Vienna with great success.—TR.

‘Another letter,’ I said, smiling, trying to cheer him.

‘Yes, the same old story.’

‘Ah, . . . is she young?’

‘Alas, yes.’

‘Good-looking?’

‘Too good-looking. And such an intellect, such a soul!’

‘And she loves you?’

‘She says so; she writes to me to that effect.’

‘It seems to me that, if in addition to this, she gives you proof’

‘Of course she gives me proof. But, after all, what do proofs prove?’

‘Oh, if we are going to have an edition of the fifth act of “Othello”—’

‘Just look at this letter; there is no harm in showing it to you, seeing that there is no signature. Read and judge for yourself.’

When I had read the letter, I could not help saying, ‘What in heaven’s name is there to grieve you in all this. This is the letter of a woman of superior intellect and education. It is, moreover, affectionate, nay, passionate to a degree. What more do you want?’

‘What more do I want?’ he exclaimed, with a gesture of despair. ‘What more do I want? I want twenty years less. I am sixty years old.’

‘What does that signify, if she looks upon you as a man of thirty.’

‘But just look at me. Look at my hollow cheeks, at my grey hair, at my wrinkled forehead.’

‘The wrinkles of a man of genius do not count. Women are very different from us. We men cannot conceive love without beauty. But women see in men, or fancy they see, all kinds of things. Sometimes it is a man’s courage with which they are in love ; at others it is with the glory attached to his name ; in a third case because he is unhappy. Very often they love the very qualities in us which we are most sadly lacking.’

‘That’s what she tells me when she sees me racked with despair.’

‘Do you mean to say that you tell her, that you show your despair?’

‘How can I hide it? Every now and then I drop, all of a sudden, into a seat sobbing as if my heart would break. It’s that horrid thought which suddenly assails me, and she virtually reads it. Then, with the tenderness of an angel she says, “You poor, miserable, ungrateful creature what can I do to convince you? Come, let us look at it from a rational point. What interest can I possibly have in telling you that I love you? Have I not cast aside everything for you. Am I not exposing myself to a thousand dangers for you?” And more often than not, she takes my head in her hands and I feel the scalding tears running down my neck. Nevertheless, in spite of all this, there rings constantly in my ears

that horrid word—"I am sixty years of age, she cannot love me, she does not love me." Ah, my dear Legouv , if you but knew the agony of all this, if you but knew what it is to make for one's self a hell in the midst of heaven.'

I left him without having been able to comfort him, and, I admit, deeply moved, not only at his grief, but at his humility. How different from the puerile pride of Chateaubriand and Goethe who were so idiotically sure of their genius arraying them in a garment of perpetual youth that no amount of adoration surprised them. How infinitely do I prefer Berlioz ; how much more human he is ; and how touched am I at the sight of this reputedly proud spirit, who becomes utterly forgetful of being a great artist in order to remember only that he is an old man.

I have arrived at the last stage of that excursion 'through the soul and genius' of Berlioz, for his soul and his genius are closely bound up together and furnish the explanation of one another.

Gounod had just been elected a member of the Institute ; Berlioz had cordially, arduously and fraternally worked for him to that effect. It is only one more reply I could give to the charge of selfishness so often preferred against him. Gounod had given a dinner in honour of his election. We separated about midnight. Berlioz was very tired and could scarcely drag himself along ; I offered

him my arm to see him home to the Rue de Calais. As of old we found ourselves in the deserted streets recommencing our nocturnal rambles. He did not utter a word, but toiled along, stooping and every now and then drawing one of those deep sighs I knew so well. As a matter of course I put the usual question—‘What is the matter now?’

‘A few lines I had from her this morning?’

‘From whom? From the lady you met at Baden or from someone else?’

‘From someone else,’ he answered. ‘You’ll think me very odd. Do you remember Estelle?’

‘Which Estelle?’

‘The young girl at Meylan?’

‘The young girl with whom you were in love at twelve?’

‘Yes; I met her some time ago, and that meeting was enough. Assuredly, dear friend, Virgil is right and his

“ . . . Agnosco veteris vestigia flammæ.”

is a cry straight from the heart.’

‘Your old flame? What do you mean?’

‘Oh, it’s perfectly absurd, ridiculous, I am well aware of it. . . . But that doesn’t matter a bit. As Hamlet says, “*There are more things in the human soul, Horatio, than your philosophy can grasp.*” * The

* I have translated as literally as I could; ‘Il y a plus de choses dans l’âme humaine, Horatius, qu’il n’en peut tenir dans votre philosophie.’ It is probable that Berlioz who, as we have already seen, knew little or no English quoted from a French version and that M. Legouvé, though aware of this mistake, faithfully quotes him.—TR.

fact is that at the sight of her the whole of my childhood, of my youth welled into my heart. That electric shock which I felt of yore at her sight went through my heart again as it did more than fifty years ago.'

'But tell me, how old is she?'

'She is six years older than I, and I am over sixty.'

'She must be a marvel, a kind of Ninon.' *

'I know nothing about that, but I don't think so. But what, after all, is her face or her age to me. There is nothing real in this world, dear friend, except what takes place in that small nook of the human being, which is called the heart. Well, let me tell you that I, old as I am, a widower and almost alone in the world, have concentrated the whole of my life in that obscure little village of Meylan where she lives. The only thing that keeps me up is the idea of being able to spend a month by her side this autumn. But for the permission she gave me to write to her, and her answer to my letters now and then, this infernal Paris would kill me.'

'Have you told her you love her?'

'Yes.'

'What did she say?'

'She seemed stupified and somewhat frightened at first. I fancy she thought me mad; but I gradually impressed her with the sincerity of my

* Ninon de Lenclos who preserved her beauty up to eighty or more.—TR.

love. I am by no means exacting. My poor passion is content with so very little. To sit by her side, to watch her turning her spinning wheel, for she spins, to pick up her spectacles, for she wears glasses, to listen to the sound of her voice, to read her a passage from Shakespeare now and then, to consult her on my affairs and to hear her chide me. . . . Oh, my dear friend, my dear friend, there is nothing that can compare to a first love. Nothing can equal its force.' And almost choking with emotion he sat down on the kerb at the corner of the Rue Mansard. The light of the gas-lamp fell on his pale face, and made him look like a spectre ; tears like those which had so often moved me when he was a young man coursed down his cheeks. A boundless, tender pity crept into my heart at the sight of that great artist, condemned to drag the chain of passion throughout his life, and my emotion was intensified by the recollection of that magnificent and glorious Michael-Angelo, dissolved in tears and kneeling at seventy by the corpse of the woman he loved, the Marchesa di Pescaire.

We must not judge those extraordinary beings by the standard of ordinary men. They are stars which have laws of their own. They are not like those pure and serene stars that shed a gentle and uninterrupted light during the calm and tranquil nights ; they are comets. The orbit they describe, the shape they assume, the light they shed, the influence they

exercise, the spot whence they come, the spot whither they go, everything is strange and consistent with the rest. Was it Berlioz' genius which influenced his heart, or was it his heart that influenced his genius. It is difficult to say, but the one is virtually the portrait of the other. Perhaps, it was necessary to love as he did in order to sing as he did. Those stormy, mad, despairing passions, are they not fully explained by the melancholy, odd, restless, and let me add, irresistibly tender features of his works. We would do well to remember that no one has sung in sweeter accents than Berlioz. The most enduring part of his work will be found perhaps, not in his grandest conceptions, but in his masterpieces portraying the most exquisite and inmost poesy of life, such as the septet of 'Les Troyens,' the duet of 'Béatrice and Bénédict,' the second part of 'L'Enfance du Christ,' 'La Danse des Sylphes.' The genius which is so fond of the blare of trumpets and thunderclaps is perhaps never more sublime than when he makes very little noise. From that abundance of contrasts sprang undoubtedly the incredible charm of Berlioz. M. Guizot who assuredly had a rare knowledge of men if ever any one had, said to me one day, 'I have met a great many illustrious artists in your home. The one who impressed me most is M. Berlioz; he is decidedly a most original being.'

M. Guizot had employed the right word. In Berlioz everything was original. He was a com-

pound of enthusiasm and sarcasm. One never knew what to expect of him. His conversation kept one spellbound by its very uneven course. Every now and then there were long periods of silence, while his eyes were fixed in sombre meditation on the ground as if wanting to fathom some nameless abyss. After which there came sudden, startling, dazzling awakenings with bursts of affectionate, touching, often comic metaphors, accompanied by homeric shouts of laughter; the sudden bursts of joy of a child. He was not very well read and he had only two favourite books. But such books: Virgil and Shakespeare. He knew them by heart. The librarian of the 'Institute,' the learned M. Tardieu has told me that Berlioz frequently came before the hour appointed for the meetings of his section and that he always asked for a book and always for the same, Virgil. Like all 'single-book' men, as our forebears used to say, he introduced, as a matter of course, and without the least premeditation, the lines of his two friends in his conversation, and often drew new and pungent observations from them. In a letter on the subject of 'Les Troyens,' I find the following significant phrase: 'I have just finished the duo of the fourth act; it is a scene I have stolen from Shakespeare's "Merchant of Venice"; and I have "virgilised" it. That delightful love prattle between Jessica and Lorenzo is one of the things wanting in Virgil. Shakespeare has supplied it and I have

retaken it from him and am trying to blend the two together. *What a couple of singers these two were.*'

But the most powerful attraction in Berlioz sprang from the intense sympathy one felt for his sufferings. Frankly, one cannot deny that he has been very unhappy. Wretched health and a body undermined by the privations he suffered in his youth, poverty verging on starvation; melancholy verging on spleen; the trials and heartburnings of the beginning of a career having their sequel in the disappointments of his ripe manhood; these among other things fell to his lot during the forty years' struggle against the supercilious contempt of that Paris which he worshipped and which he abused with the frenzy of a rejected lover. Then there were the ever recurring periods of exile to foreign countries in quest of that small modicum of fame which his country denied to him. He was checked in the very development of his talent. I remember as if it were but yesterday, his entering my room, paler and more sombre even than usual and flinging himself into a chair.

'Do you know what has happened to me?' he asked. 'For the last four days I have been haunted by the idea of a symphony, a magnificent, fruitful, original idea. For the last four days I have been endeavouring to get away from it. I am trying to exorcise it like the spirit of evil.'

'But why; why not write your symphony?'

‘Because if I do write it, I should like it to be performed, and the performance, the rehearsals, the copying out of the orchestral score, the hire of the concert room, the salaries of the singers would cost four thousand francs, and I haven’t the four thousand francs.’

Is not this simply horrible? That great artist compelled to stifle the offspring of his thought in its very womb, to commit moral infanticide. No doubt, many other men of genius equal and superior to his have suffered as much as, and more than he. What could be more worthy of pity than the deafness of Beethoven which virtually made the world of sound a dead letter to him, and debarred him from hearing the sublime melodies with which he delighted every ear but his! In our days we have seen Ingres, Delacroix, Corot flouted, misjudged, their talents denied; but at any rate Beethoven was rewarded by an immense fame for an immense grief, and our three painters have reaped the glory of their works during their lifetime. Berlioz has only been appreciated and understood after he was carried to his grave, and his posthumous glory only seems another piece of irony inflicted by fate, a kind of continuation of his ‘bad luck.’ Hence my anxiety to delude myself into the belief that in the spot where he dwells (the superstition, if it be one, is pardonable in a friend) he can witness from a distance the triumphant recognition of his genius, that something

or someone can tell him of his name being associated with that of Beethoven, that his works move the masses, that his symphonies are 'drawing' money, that orchestral directors are being decorated for merely having his music performed. How happy and astonished he must feel. Happy, yes; as for being astonished, I doubt it, for he expected all this.

CHAPTER VIII

Eugène Sue.—A Puzzle in Connection with his Sister and Mine.—How we became acquainted.—The Furore created by ‘Les Mystères de Paris.’—Sue’s Boyhood and Youth.—His Father.—A Substitute for post-prandial Coffee.—Eugène Sue is appointed Doctor to the French Fleet without possessing the slightest knowledge of Medicine or Surgery.—The Result of his three years’ Cruise.—His first Nautical Tales.—‘Atar Gull.’—A Critic.—Sue at M. Gudin’s Studio.—The Origin of some of his Characters.—His Practical Jokes.—The Difference between Balzac’s and Sue’s Works.—Two Literary Salons.—A Curious Glimpse of Chateaubriand.—Sue in Society.—Sue’s Society Novels.—Sue’s Extravagance.—His Ruin.—A Period of Stagnation.—How he is roused from his Lethargy.—He Retires to the Country.—The initial Chapters of ‘Les Mystères de Paris.’—The Effect of the Book.—How he wrote it.—Renewed Prosperity and renewed Extravagance.—Camille Pleyel, the Founder of the Firm of Pleyel et Cie.—An Anecdote of Beethoven.—Sue’s Charity.—Sue’s Political Opinions.—The Coup d’État and Sue’s Action with regard to it.—His Second Retirement to the Country.—His Death.

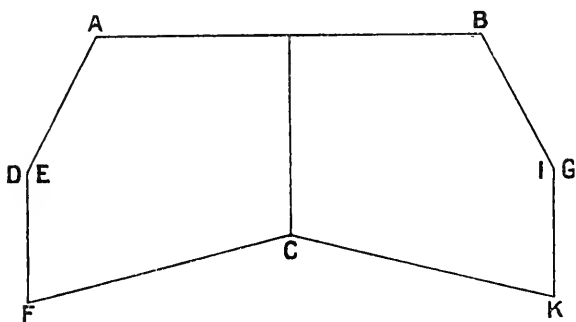
I

ONE morning about twenty years ago, I was sitting in the bath at Plombières, where I had been soaking in company with a dozen or so of fellow-sufferers of both sexes for two hours and a half, when in order to while away the tedium, I suddenly bethought myself of asking the following question, as a kind of riddle :
‘Is it possible for two men to have the same sister

without being related to one another?' A solicitor, sitting on a marble seat next to me, and, like myself, wrapt in the long white woollen gown, which made us look like a couple of Carthusians, replied, after a moment's consideration: 'It is impossible,' and the whole batch of bathers chimed in, 'It is impossible.' 'It is impossible,' said a barrister, when all the others had ceased speaking. 'It is, on the contrary, very possible,' I retorted, 'and I know two men who are in that position, Eugène Sue and I.' 'Just explain it to us,' was the next exclamation, uttered in chorus also. 'Try to find it out for yourselves first,' I said. They tried and failed; thereupon I turned to the attendant and asked him to bring me the slate on which he inscribed the names of his bathers.

'What are you going to do?' was the question.

'Going to prove it to you by means of a drawing,' I answered, and then I drew the following figure:



'What sort of geometry do you call that?' they all exclaimed.

‘I told you; it is my demonstration. A and B represent M. Sue and Mdlle. Sauvan, that is, the husband and wife; C represents their daughter Flora Sue. M. Sue and Mdlle. Sauvan were divorced.’

‘Oh,’ exclaimed the solicitor, ‘you did not tell us that.’

‘I left you to find it out. Besides, now that I have told you, do you understand?’

‘No, not yet.’

‘Then listen. D represents the same M. Sue, but in this instance married to a second wife represented by E, from which marriage is born a son, represented by F, which F is none other than Eugène Sue. G. represents Mdlle. Sauvan, but this time as the wife of I, that is of M. Legouvé from which marriage is born K, or in other words, your obedient servant, E. Legouvé.

‘Eugène Sue and Ernest Legouvé have, therefore, the same sister, but are not related to one another, for though there are two diagonal lines connecting each of them with Flora Sue, there is no transversal line connecting them.’

This small genealogical problem, in the discussion of which our female neighbours took part, kept us cheerfully occupied until the hour struck for our deliverance, and we parted at eight in the morning, some to go to bed, others to go for a walk. I took a stroll in the wooded glades that lead to the Stanislas

fountain, where one of my fellow-bathers soon joined me. 'I have come after you,' he said, 'in order to continue our conversation. I should like to talk to you about Eugène Sue ; I should like you to tell me how he worked, what manner of man he was.'

'That's a very big question. It would take me a long while to answer it.'

'So much the better, we have plenty of time to spare, and it would be difficult to select a better spot for the walk of two peripatetics.'

'All right, have it your own way. Let me begin by telling you that with Eugène Sue, the life of the novelist was in itself like a novel, and the transformations of his talent remind one of an actor who changes his part in each act of the self-same piece ; in addition to this, there is more than one question of art mixed up with him : finally, bound up with the origin of our friendship, there is a personal recollection which is very precious to me, the name of a being whom I loved very tenderly.'

'What then was that origin ?'

'Sue and I were very much attached to one another, but we ought never to have been. There was no love lost between his father and mine, as you may easily imagine, and everything was calculated to keep us apart, everything except the affectionate little creature who called us both brother. Having remained until the age of nine with my mother and cherished like a daughter by my father whom she worshipped, she

was, at the death of my mother, suddenly taken away from our home and relegated to a small boarding school in the faubourg Saint-Antoine.

‘The untrammelled family life was succeeded by the cloistered existence in a boarding school. She was only allowed a glimpse from time to time of the little brother whom she had loved and tended from his very birth and who was surreptitiously taken to see her three or four times during the year; fortunately for her, every Sunday she found at her father’s another and bigger brother for whom she conceived a love equal to that she had for me, and to whom she talked constantly about me, so that before Eugène Sue and I had seen one another we were already well acquainted and as it were loved one another for her sake. No heart was ever more fit to bring about such a *rapprochement* than that child’s. Whether from natural causes or from the effects of her ill-regulated education, or from a presentiment of a premature death (we were to lose her in the flush of her youth), she showed both as a little girl and as a young girl a melancholy sensitiveness, an affectionate disposition vibrating at the slightest touch, which affection, up to her marriage and even afterwards concentrated itself on us two with a tenderness, heightened by her imagination. We were her heroes, around which she was constantly weaving a fresh novel. When the death of her parents and her own marriage had removed the obstacles that had kept Eugène Sue and me apart, her dominant idea was

first to bring us together, then to have us both beneath her own roof. She imagined that we should really not belong to her until the day we took up our abode with her and she took us with her to a small property, the Château de Marrault, hidden away among the mountains of the Morvan, which property had been part of her husband's marriage settlement. At that time Eugène Sue was twenty-six ; I was twenty-three ; we had already made our débuts in literature ; he had published in *La Mode* some naval sketches, which had been favourably noticed, I had gained the prize for poetry at the Academy, which in our days would be a disadvantage rather than an advantage, but which in 1829 was regarded as an earnest of better things.

‘At the end of a magnificent autumn, then, we had taken up our quarters amidst the rugged grandeur of those wild regions and amidst the gentle comforts of that precious hospitality. The mania for work had caught hold of us. Each evening we were seated with our dear sister around the old-fashioned fireplace, and to the accompaniment of the November winds sighing through the grand trees we read to her what we had written during the day. I can see her now, ensconced in her armchair, her wan face already showing the traces of disease, her soft, brown eyes fixed on us, listening to us with her soul as well as with her mind, surprised, but pleased and somewhat astonished at finding us so different from one

another, cheering us on our respective paths and making us smile at the high hopes she built on us. She indulged so freely in these that, without believing in them ourselves, we were comforted and borne up by them ; and it was thus that, inspired by that noble and tender heart, there sprang up between me and Eugène Sue a bond which was more than friendship, which was almost a brotherly love.'

'I am very glad, I asked you about him,' remarked my companion. 'I shall have my wish at last and get a better knowledge of the man. I may tell you that there are few literary figures which have a greater attraction for me, and at the same time puzzle me more than his. Everything about him is strange. He has had his day of immense popularity, and what does there remain of it? More than a mere name, no doubt, for several of his novels still command a number of readers ; but though many of the characters he created, such as Rodin, Pipelet, Fleur-de-Marie, the Schoolmaster still live in the popular imagination, the works themselves of which they formed a part, have gone down in general estimation. I remember, as if it were to-day, the astounding effect of "*Les Mystères de Paris*," I was attached to the private office of M. Duchâtel (the Minister); the instalment of the *Journal des Débats*, was anxiously looked for every morning ; one day the Minister entered my room in an evident hurry, and I was under the impression that some great political event had

happened. "Well," he said, "do you know that 'La Louve' is dead?" La Louve was one of the heroines of the "Mystères." How is it that this "power in fiction" has partly foundered? Balzac has swamped Eugène Sue. Is it just; and what was the reason? Did his political opinions have anything to do with it? What sort of man was this dandy who ended his days in the skin of a democrat? Was it conviction, or an eye to the main chance? And what about his legendary extravagance and display, and about his success with the fairer sex? In short, he seems to me a kind of enigma, to which I should like you to give me the key; but before all things let me beg of you not to give me a conventional portrait.'

'You need not fear my doing that. I will not only tell you nothing but the truth, but the whole truth. To impart life to a portrait one must faithfully reproduce not only the defects of the original, but his good qualities. Raphael had assuredly no hesitation in making Cardinal Bembo squint. Hence, I will hide neither Eugène Sue's ridiculous mistakes, nor his preposterous vanity, nor even his graver defects; my friendship dictates that line of conduct. The transformation in him was so passing strange, that you will scarcely believe the good I am going to say of him unless I say the harm also. His final goal will strike you all the more when I shall have shown you his starting point and the intermediate stages of

his career. Let us begin, therefore, with his youth and first attempts.'

'I am all attention.'

'You have no doubt read, seeing that you seem well acquainted with his works, a story from his pen, entitled, 'Le Parisien en mer,' and you recollect no doubt, that youngster of thirteen, that sceptical, vicious, clever youngster, who gibes at everything, whose gibes not only assume the form of cynicism but of heroism, who gibes at his superiors, who gibes at the sea, who gibes at death, who is surprised at nothing, whom nothing stops, and who has himself killed in Spain, because he hustles a whole procession in running after a girl. It is simply a masterpiece. Well, that is one of the portraits of Sue himself. There was an indescribable fund of the Paris gutter-snipe in him. His childhood reminds one of François Villon's, a Villon belonging to a good family. His father, a wealthy physician sent him as a day boarder to the Lycée Bourbon : never in your life did you meet with a more detestable schoolboy ; not only learning nothing himself but preventing others from learning ; making sport of everyone, of his teachers as well as of his schoolfellows ; expelled at every moment, maintaining amidst all his impish tricks a certain pretension to be considered a dandy, of which pretension he could never rid himself ; reluctant to appear in public with a chum who was not well-dressed ; getting home and despoiling his father's

cellar and profiting by his absence to have a drinking bout with his friends ; in short, "the Parisian on the high Seas." A trait of his boyhood will depict him better than any number of words. His father, as he grew older, could neither do without coffee, nor take it. His digestive apparatus demanded it, his nervous temperament forbade it. Thereupon he conceived the idea of replacing his post-prandial coffee by another stimulant. The stimulant consisted of a scene with his son in which the latter was overwhelmed with reproaches, his laziness easily furnishing a pretext for such. The father lashed his blood to the boiling point, and in that way stimulated his digestion. His "pickle" of a son was not slow to perceive this and forthwith, in order to drive his father frantic, became the most assiduous of scholars.

"Monsieur," said his father one day, "what lessons have you to prepare for to-morrow?"

"A translation, father."

"Of course you haven't written the first line of it."

"I have done the whole of it, father."

"That's something quite new for you."

"Here it is, father."

"Full of mistakes, I daresay, and impossible to decipher."

"I trust not, father," says the lad, with a contrite look, "but you had better judge for yourself."

‘To the old man’s surprise the writing is faultless, and not a single mistake in the text. Stupefied, Sue’s father lashes himself into a rage against himself, being unable to lash himself into a rage against his son. His dinner was going to disagree with him and he felt it. “Surely,” he says at last, flinging the translation on the table, “luck is a great thing. But I feel certain you have forgotten the letter I told you to take to your aunt.”

“Here is the answer, father.”

“The answer,” yells the old man, “you are doing it on purpose, it seems. You have taken it into your head to be punctual and to do what you are told. And doing your work besides. I can see what you are driving at. You want to make me look ridiculous, to enjoy my disappointment. A brat like you, respecting nothing, believing in nothing.” The moment he had started on the subject of his son’s defects, the father knew he was on the right track and went on inveighing until he fancied he had replaced the stimulant of his cup of coffee.’

‘Do you know that this is a very comic invention,’ remarked my companion.

‘I keep the word for further use, and now I will tell you a trait of his young days which will complete our first sketch. At twenty he had not thought of a profession and was about as ignorant as possible. One morning his father enters his room and tells him to get ready to start in a week. “Where am I

going to?" "To Toulon." "What am I going to Toulon for?" "To embark on one of the King's ships in a little while."

'You don't mean to say that his father shipped him off as a cabin boy?' exclaimed my companion.

'Not as a cabin boy, but as a doctor.'

'Was he a doctor?'

'Not in the least.'

'In that case, by what right could he ship him off as a doctor?'

'By no right whatsoever, except by that of his having attended in an amateurish kind of way a course of lectures on medicine by order of his father, and a few lectures on anatomy when his father was the lecturer. But seeing that his father was the King's physician, he presented his son as his pupil. That was the way in which Eugène Sue after a short stay at the hospital in Toulon, under some other name than his own, made his appearance one day on the deck of one of the King's vessels in the uniform and with the title of surgeon-in-chief. Can you imagine the impression on such a sceptic and scoffer by a like abuse of favouritism. Consequently, no sooner was he on board than he sent for the second doctor, his subordinate who had been waiting and hoping for that appointment during the last three years. "Monsieur," he said to him, "the uniform I wear ought to have been yours; the place I occupy belongs to you by right. I am here only the most monstrous piece of iniquity. Not to

mince matters, I know no more of the Codex* than of the Code, hence, you will understand that I am too honest to prescribe the most innocent drug for the humblest among the crew: you'll do everything, I'll countersign your prescriptions; only in order to preserve the decorum, I'll take charge of the hygienic arrangements of the vessel, that is, I'll impress upon the sailors not to drink too much. And now—

“Soyons amis, Cinna, c'est moi qui t'en convie.”

‘After that introduction which converted his subordinate into the best of comrades, Eugène Sue set sail for Spain, for the West Indies, for Greece. Stricken down with yellow fever at Martinique, his life is saved by a negress, who falls in love with him; he is present at the battle of Navarino, whence he writes letters full of sarcasm against the great powers whom he represents as so many pirates, and full of sympathy with the Turks, whom he represents as the victims of the basest of treachery. After three years of wandering he returns, his head crammed with facts, with events, with vivid recollections of manners and customs, with mental pictures of original characters. His imagination has become, as it were, a palette, charged with the most brilliant as well as sombre colours, for he has observed, experienced and suffered more during those three years than most men in the whole course of their existence; and

* The pharmacopœia adopted by the Paris Faculty of Medicine.—TR.

brings back with him a singular mixture of power, an unconscious faculty for inventing, a fund of pitiless raillery. The mere troublesome lad had become a poet, a poet without consciousness of the poetry within him, a writer without the technical knowledge. Without the technical knowledge is the appropriate term, for his unsuccessful studies had in no way prepared him for the difficult and laborious practice with the pen, but if he had not that which it is possible to acquire, on the other hand he had that which it is impossible to acquire, namely a style full of life and colour, brilliancy and dash; he had all these to such a degree that in his very first pages the public, which is rarely mistaken, recognised the hand of the born artist. The few scenes of a sailor's life when, afloat, dashed off at hap-hazard, for a periodical and afterwards published in a volume entitled "Plick et Plock" earned for him the sobriquet of the "French Cooper"* the founder of the marine novel. One day he got up and found himself the founder of a new school as he had found himself surgeon-in-chief. He accepted the title and the position with as much surprise as good-natured carelessness and indifference, showing from the very start that modest appreciation of himself which to the end constituted one of his greatest charms.'

'My ears do not deceive me? Do you mean to

* M. Legouv  says Cooper, but does he not mean Marryat?—TR.

tell me that amidst the blare and prestige of his noisy popularity, Eugène Sue was a modest man?’

‘More than modest, absolutely ignorant of his own potentiality. I will give you the most touching and conclusive proofs of this. His second success followed very hard, though, upon his first. A few months after “Plick and Plock,” “Atar Gull” appeared. The effect was immense. The mixture of dramatic audacity and sarcasm, of pathetic or graceful scenes wound up by the most insolent of dénouements, the prize for exemplary virtue given by the Academy to that murderous, negro poisoner, all that was productive of great scandal and frantic rage, as well as of great enthusiasm among the public and gave rise to a characteristic incident. Amidst the chorus of praise with which the papers hailed the new work, there rang forth like a shrill, false note, a short, bitter, bantering article from a critic who was also a novelist and an intimate friend of Eugène Sue. The same writer had shown himself very favourably disposed to “Plick and Plock.”

‘Surprised and vexed, Eugène Sue makes his way to his house. “That you do not like my book,” he says to him, “is simply a matter of taste; that you should state your opinion is simply a matter of conscience, but I fail to understand the reason for this terrible ‘slating.’”

“The ‘slating’ is perfectly natural, my dear boy,” is the answer. “When ‘Plick and Plock’ appeared,

I praised it warmly. I only considered you a young fellow in good society, with lots of money, who wanted as it were a patent as a man of wit and who would not repeat the same performance. But scarcely six months have gone by after your first work when you publish a second, and what is more, a second which is much better than the first and which creates a greater furore than the first. I must put a stop to that for it means competition. There are only a certain number of novel readers. If you take a share of these, we go short of them, I try to crush you, all is fair in love and war."

'To which Eugène Sue replied as coolly as possible. "Well, my dear boy, you only show yourself the 'ninny' you are. You ought to have tried to crush me at the beginning. I was unknown, and you might have done me a great deal of harm ; at present it is too late ; you have allowed me to come to the fore. Your criticisms will only do me good, by giving me what I lacked, the very thing that crowns a success, viz., people who are envious. After all, I am obliged to you."

'A third work, "*La Salamandre*" virtually established his reputation as a nautical novelist and revealed the powerful colourist. Read that chapter beginning with "The Salamander was paid off yesterday," and it will have the effect on you of looking at that Dutch picture of the *Kermesse* (fair) in the Louvre. Moreover, it was also in that book that Sue attempted for

the first time to sketch the upper classes. A certain Count Szaffie who bears the unmistakable stamp of the elegant libertine, began to haunt the imagination of a number of women, and terminated the first period of Sue's literary career.

‘But Sue was more than a mere colourist with the pen, he was also a colourist with the brush. While still very young he had shown a taste for painting; Gudin considered him one of his best pupils. For many years there was a halo of legend about the studio of Gudin. The great mystifications and practical jokes which set the whole of Paris agog in the latter part of the Restoration and the beginning of the reign of Louis-Philippe, and with which were connected the names of Romieu, Malitourne and Henri Monnier were hatched in the studio of Gudin. They were the pupils of Gudin who almost drove that poor concierge of the Rue Mont-Blanc into a mad-house by going each morning to ask him for a lock of his hair. They were the pupils of Gudin who one day lowered a skeleton through the chimney of the studio and made it dance a *pas seul* over the saucepans of the concierge. They were the pupils of Gudin who caused the sudden disappearance of three little chimney sweeps, and set the whole of the neighbourhood frantic with excitement in the search after them. Those young fiends having discovered a cupboard in the studio through which there ran the flue of an adjoining house, made a hole in it. Next

morning a tiny chimney sweep starts from below and when he has reached the altitude of the cupboard he is seized, drawn through the hole and sequestered. As a matter of course a second chimney sweep is sent after the first and meets with the same fate. A third is dispatched after his two comrades and is kidnapped in the same manner. The inhabitants of the quarter repair in a crowd to the office of the Commissary of Police, but the official knows his customers and does not seem in the least puzzled. "Is not M. Gudin's studio in the next house?" he asks. "Yes," is the answer. "Then I know what to do," he remarks and repairs at once to Gudin's studio where he finds the three little chimney sweeps munching chestnuts with the pupils round the stove.

'Eugène Sue was the ringleader in all those mystifications. At first the pupils had attempted to treat him as a kind of "young swell," but his sarcasm, his droll inventions, and above all his quiet determination not to be put down had quickly shown them that they had found their master.

'Here is one of his famous exploits.

'Théodore Gudin was a fashionable painter. A lady of title wrote to him to paint a panel for her drawing-room, asking him at the same time to come and see the apartment first.

"I don't know why," says Eugène Sue to him, "but I have my suspicions about this baroness. I fancy it's a trap to get you into her apartments. You

had better let me go in your stead. I have an idea that we shall get some fun out of this."

'Gudin consents, and Eugène Sue calls upon the baroness. After a little while, the pupil "had managed to ingratiate himself so well," as the Marquis de Turcaret says, that the lady proposed to pay him a visit at his studio.

"I shall be delighted. To-morrow at twelve," replies Sue.

'Next day at the stroke of twelve there is a ring at the bell, and the door is opened. The lady walks into the studio in which there is not a single pupil and goes straight up to the easel where the real Gudin is at work.

"M. Gudin, monsieur," she says.

"I am M. Gudin, madame," is the answer.

"Excuse me, I wish to see M. Gudin, the celebrated marine painter."

"I am M. Gudin, the marine painter, madame."

"You," exclaimed the lady, all of a tremble, "but that's impossible. Is there any other M. Gudin?"

"I think not, madame. I am not aware that there is another painter of that name."

'Meanwhile a servant in livery is pottering about the studio, going about his work in a very awkward manner. Gudin, turning to him, says, "Joseph, look to that fire, put a log on, madame seems to be cold." The servant seems to be in no hurry to obey his

master's orders, he turns his back, and averts his face, and at last his master gets impatient.

““When you have done crawling about sideways like a crab, perhaps you'll put a log on that fire,” exclaimed Gudin. “Come and put that log on.”

‘The servant, or rather Eugène Sue who has donned the servant's livery, shuffles along, awkwardly flings a log on the fire and on rising from his recumbent position, finds himself face to face with the baroness, who utters a cry of horror on recognising the individual whom she has treated like the real Gudin. I need not enlarge upon the situation, you may picture to yourself the contrite looks of Eugène Sue in his borrowed livery, the abrupt departure of the infuriated lady, and the roars of laughter accompanying her exit. But the funniest part of the story is the lady's meeting with Eugène Sue, against whom she runs three days afterwards on turning the corner of a street, when she gives him a withering look, and flings the word “Flunkey” at him.’

My companion who had listened to my story without interruption, could not help exclaiming: ‘The deuce, that's “too much of a joke,” as they say nowadays.’

‘I quite agree with you,’ I answered, ‘and I should be the last to tolerate such a thing, but if I am to give you the accurate portrait I promised you, I am bound to tell you everything. I admit it's too much of a joke, but it's very comical. But this happens to

be exactly one of the particular aspects of Eugène Sue's talents, the side in which he differs most essentially from Balzac and in virtue of which he is superior to him. Balzac is, I admit, a man of genius, but his is by no means a cheerful genius. People have compared him to Molière. I am agreeable, but he is a Molière who does not raise a laugh. Eugène Sue's lively mind and disposition have created innumerable types, characters and situations, which are comical to a degree, such as Pipelet and his wife, Cabrion, Hercule Hardy, the prologue to Miss Mary, the scenes of Sécherin and Mdlle. de Maran. 'You'll find nothing of the kind in the author of "Eugénie Grandet." Balzac is more than amusing, but he is not always amusing. His profundity of thought is often heavy and his very seriousness becomes wearisome.'

'But why then are Eugène Sue's works dead as a doornail and Balzac's still full of vitality?'

'Why, there are many causes.'

'Tell me some? Is it because Balzac's creative power is superior to that of Sue?'

'No; Sue has created more typical characters, more novel situations than Balzac. Balzac is a great observer, a great thinker, but the imagination in adducing facts often fails him. The dramatic inventor is not equal to the moralist.'

'Is his superiority due to the strength and truth of his characters?'

‘That is one of his most genuine merits. No one has surpassed him in the art of breathing life into fictitious characters. Nevertheless, I am compelled to admit that, by dint of being profound, he often ceases to be true. His characters are so highly finished, they are brought into such strong relief, that every now and then they seem to be beyond the pale of humanity. Balzac is too mathematical, he too often treats the human heart as a mere theorem, and with one deduction after another finally transforms a real being into a chimerical one. *La Cousine Bette* is a woman at the outset and ends up by being a monster.’

‘If such be the case, I can only repeat my question: Whence the different fates of the two men? Why is Balzac wrapt in a halo of glory and Sue in a shroud of oblivion?’

‘Why? Because Balzac has been a worker and Sue only a producer. Because art to Balzac meant a mission and to Eugène Sue an amusement; because Balzac had faith in himself, and Eugène, partly from indifference, partly from modesty, never took himself entirely *au sérieux*; because Balzac sat touching up a sentence for hours, rewrote a page ten times, remodelled four successive proofs after having written his manuscript three times over; because, in short Balzac by dint of labour and patience created for himself a style after the image of his powerful thought, while Eugène Sue wrote guided by his happy inspira-

tion only, and because style is to the creations of the intellect what alcohol is to bodily things, it preserves them. Finally, there is a more conclusive reason than all the others ; Balzac in virtue of his defects as well as his merits has become the chief of a school which came after him. A curious fact may be noticed in connection with this. As a rule the great artists who have become shrouded in oblivion are dethroned monarchs, they do not die a natural death, they are killed by their successors. It is but natural. An artist or a group of artists only exercises his or their sway upon a period because they represent the taste of that period. The period passes away, the taste undergoes a change, different principles of art spring up, a new generation arises and adopts a new banner. What is the result? A battle, in which the newcomers rout the actual occupiers of the field. That was the way in which the literature of the Restoration killed the literature of the Empire, and the school of natural landscape ousted that of historical landscape. But when, through some fortunate circumstance an artist of yesterday has forestalled the taste of tomorrow, when his works happen to be in harmony with the new principles, his reputation takes as it were a new lease. The young workers, far from overthrowing him, applaud him, arm themselves with his authority, adopt him as their chief and their forebear. This has happened to André Chénier, to Eugène Delacroix, to Balzac. The new school of fiction

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glorifies in him its own ideas. The triumph of Balzac is the triumph of observation over imagination, the advent of the scientific process in works of art, of description carried to extravagance, of analysis, not only of psychological analysis but of pathological analysis. It is no longer a question of depicting the depths of the human soul, but, excuse the expression, its drains. Medical Science terms certain unknown and strange diseases, *cases*; well, that which is most eagerly looked for in the literature of to-day are *cases*. Balzac's works teem with that kind of investigation. We have gone a long way beyond Molière's definition: "*Dramatic art is simply the art of pleasing.*" "To please, to amuse, to interest, that is all very well," say the young people, "we'll do all that if we happen to get a chance. But that is not our primary aim. The ideal novel of to-day is the *documentary* novel."

'And now, can you understand the decline of the reputation of Sue who had no aim beyond skilful invention, wherewith to enliven and who, it is but fair to say, lacked that power of analysis and that masterly style which are at present necessities to our imagination and which constitute one of the most precious merits of the new school. I can sum up my meaning in one sentence; Balzac is a writer of genius, Eugène Sue is only an amateur of genius—a gentleman who has taken to literature. Gentleman is the right word, for he has carried into the literary profession not only the probity, but all the delicate and honourable pro-

ceedings of the gentleman. He was scrupulous to a degree with regard to his literary engagements ; he earned a great deal of money with his pen, but he never bartered or sold it. He has never had a lawsuit with a publisher and his somewhat quixotic disinterestedness as well as his tastes paved the way for the second aspect in which I will show you to him directly, the aristocrat.'

'And through him we'll get at the democrat.'

'Yes.'

'To the convinced democrat and converted aristocrat?'

'Yes.'

'I should like to know the way in which that conversion was accomplished.'

'In a very strange way. Do you know what transformed him? His pen. As a rule it is the author who writes his work ; in this case it is the work that made the author. But we had better not anticipate. There are still two intermediary stages before we get to that final point, and I must first of all introduce you to that new society in which Eugène Sue is about to make his appearance.

II

'Under the reign of Louis-Philippe the salons exercised a rather considerable influence on literature. I will only name two of which I have some knowledge : Madame Récamier's and that of the Duchesse

de Rauzan, the worthy daughter of the celebrated Duchesse de Duras, the authoress of "Ourika" and "Edouard."

'These two salons were both alike to, and different from, one another; alike, insomuch as within their walls one met with the same medley of great aristocratic and great literary names; different, in that at Madame Récamier's it was, as it were, literature that did the honours to the nobility, while at Madame de Rauzan's it was the nobility that welcomed literature. The art of 'keeping a salon' is a very delicate and almost lost art; those two ladies possessed the secret of it, because they were endowed with the first and foremost quality necessary to it: they were distinguished, without being mentally superior to their guests; they did not aim at shining themselves, but aimed at making others shine; their cleverness consisted in their passionate fondness for cleverness.

'It will be necessary to say a few words about these two salons in order to explain the position of Eugène Sue.

'Chateaubriand had been the god of the one, and had become the god of the other. The recollection of him still pervaded, without a doubt, the atmosphere at Madame de Rauzan's; but at Madame Récamier's he was the god in the flesh, visible, though silent. Seated in his roomy chair in his nook by the fireplace he mingled in the conversation with his looks, with his facial expression, but he scarcely ever took

part in it by word of mouth, he produced the effect upon me of the god Silence. Nothing could be more charming and ingenious than Madame Récamier's efforts to convey to him everything of interest that was said around him. The smallest witicism dropped in the course of a few minutes' chat, the most trifling but nevertheless curious fact told in another corner of the salon was heard by her, caught up by her, put in relief by her, and adroitly laid by her at the feet of the object of her worship. One day I heard her make a remark which faithfully depicts her solicitude and his silence. "Nothing causes me greater despair at the loss of my sight (she was threatened with blindness), than that I shall no longer be able to read in M. de Chateaubriand's face when he is pleased." A very touching remark on the part of a Célimène,* the reader will exclaim. The fact is, that this Célimène had a very big heart and that her friendship was carried to the verge of heroism. Here is the proof. At an advanced age she was operated upon for cataract. The surgeon had absolutely forbidden her to move or to admit the faintest glimmer of light; at the same time the news reached her that her old friend Ballanche† was ill with

* The author is alluding to the Célimène of Molière's 'Misanthropie' who is not credited with a very affectionate disposition.—TR.

† Ballanche is best known by his 'Palingénésie Sociale.' He was one of the most assiduous worshippers of Chateaubriand, and in his latter days used to pass all his time with him. He lived in the Rue Lafitte, and every morning he breakfasted at Tortoni's on tea and toast covered with Brie cheese which he soaked in his tea. Then he took the omnibus to the Rue de Sèvres whence he returned late at night.—TR.

inflammation of the lungs, that the doctors had given up all hope, and that he had expressed a desire to see his old friend before he died. She immediately dressed herself and made her way through the streets to his home at the risk of her sight, and perhaps of her life. That ought to convince you? It does. Well then, we'll return to Chateaubriand.

‘Every day at three he made his appearance at Madame Récamier’s and took tea with two or three intimate friends. At four the visitors began to arrive and soon dropped into conversation, varied, amusing, without the slightest tinge of pedantry and with an absolute freedom of opinion. It was in Madame Récamier’s salon that I had the honour one day, not to make M. de Chateaubriand speak, but to make him shed tears. Jean Reynaud had just published in *Le Magasin Pittoresque* an admirable article on “The Ladder of Life.” An old engraving which you may have seen represents that ladder composed of five rungs going upward and five going downward. The two sets of rungs are connected by a small transversal platform. On the first upward rung, the new-born babe, on the rungs above, the child, the youth, the young man, then, on the platform, the full-grown man. At that point the downward ladder begins and on its rungs stand the mournful representations of our successive periods of decline until we arrive at decrepitude and the tomb. This representation of humanity was indig-

nantly protested against by Reynaud. "It is a slander against our race," he exclaimed. "It is tantamount to treating man as if he were nothing but a mere body. How dare they place on the earth, nay, almost in the mire the stage of life which is nearest to heaven. How dare they represent man as being in his final decline when he is nearest to God. It is only ill-spent lives that end up in that way. You are the dupes of the decay of the flesh, which after all, is only the being apparent. What you choose to term old age is simply the beginning of eternal youth. Shatter, therefore, that mendacious ladder and take for your model that ladder of Jacob which starts from the earth and ascends to the sky."

'With my mind still full of the article into which Jean Reynaud seems to have poured his very soul, I was giving a detailed account of it to a friend in an angle of Madame Récamier's salon, when I saw her coming towards us. "Let me beg of you," she said in a low tone, "to repeat all this to M. de Chateaubriand." "I shall be most happy," I answered, and going up to his armchair, I repeated, to the best of my ability, the eloquent words of Reynaud. As I went on, I noticed the signs of deep emotion overspreading his features ; he stared at me fixedly without uttering a word, and when I came to the passage relating to old age, he caught hold of my hand and two big tears rolled down his cheeks.

"Thank you," said Madame Récamier to me in a

low voice, and at the same moment the clock struck five. Immediately, at a sign from Madame Récamier, some one rang the bell near the mantelpiece, the door of the salon was opened and a servant appeared. In accordance with a ceremonial programme which was repeated everyday, but which I then beheld for the first time, the servant marched straight up to M. de Chateaubriand's chair, took it by the back, pulled it towards the door and began to effect its exit. M. de Chateaubriand, still silent, was being pulled from behind, and sat facing the enemy—the enemy being represented by ourselves, to impress whom he showed an admirable countenance at his departure—on whom he flashed looks in which he endeavoured to concentrate all the light there was still left in them. Then he disappeared slowly, leaving in the salon an indescribable, luminous track, an impression of something beautiful that had vanished. The moment he had crossed the threshold and the door had closed behind him, his servant placed his hands under his two arms, lifted him out of his chair with great difficulty and the decrepit old man, bent in twain, scarcely able to keep himself on his tottering legs, began to descend. If a visitor happened to meet him on the staircase, he rigorously abstained from bowing or recognising him. These were the strict orders. To do otherwise would have argued an intention of the visitor to catch the god hopelessly submitting to the decrees that rule our poor humanity.

‘Altogether different was the salon of Madame de Rauzan. More elegant than Madame Récamier’s, with a more worldly tone and air pervading it, it became the resort of three sections of society. A sprinkling of dowager duchesses and aged marchionesses, correct and dignified, a legacy bequeathed to her by her mother, imparted to the company a kind of sober and serious aspect. The Duchesse’s daughters, young and good-looking, attracted the most elegant, graceful and sprightly contingent, the youthful members of the nobility, from the Faubourg St Germain, and finally, the hostess’ well-known taste for arts and literature drew the foremost authors and musicians to her gatherings. It was a delightful mixture, and the Duchesse de Rauzan was an admirable hostess. No woman ever realised the ideal of a “great lady” more fully than she did. She had an absolute genius for falling into statuesque and graceful attitudes. With her magnificent figure, her dignified looks, lighted up by frequent smiles, her delicately shaded courtesy, she possessed the art of blending the three sections of her guests while still preserving the distinctions between them. When there was a marriage in her own set (with the Faubourg St Germain there exists only one set, *its* set), the bridegroom’s first care was to bring his bride to the salons of the Duchesse, it was equivalent to a presentation at Court. Frequently a new book was read, there were concerts, the company paying the greatest

attention. Madame de Rauzan was very strict on that point in deference to the artists, in deference to her own salon. For her salon was her life, her pride, her passion. Towards the end of her existence when already undermined by an incurable disease, she left her bed of sickness in the middle of the day, dressed, and concealing the ravages her relentless malady had already made on her face and figure, appeared smiling, gracious, attentive and amiable at four o'clock in her drawing-room. Rallying all her available strength, carefully recruited by one day of rest she lavished it in smiles upon her guests for two hours, invariably paid for afterwards by the most cruel agony, she played the part of the woman of the world as she conceived it ; in the spirit of heroism. Her salon was her battlefield, she only left it to die.

‘Eugène Sue’s visits to Madame Récamier’s salon had been few and far between, but he was very anxious to know its opinion of him. Nothing gave him greater pleasure than to be told that M. de Chateaubriand had mentioned his name and he paid great attention to such reports from Mme. Récamier’s as happened to reach Mme. de Rauzan’s salon. In the latter he was “singled out,” “made much of” and “fêted.” The first copy of all his works, magnificently bound and bearing the arms of his hostess was always on her table. Her patronage opened all the salons of the Faubourg St Germain to him. M. Molé called him “his young friend,” and this intro-

duction to aristocratic circles gave fresh zest to his talent by providing him with new models. His three great works dealing with elegant society date from that period, namely : "La Couratcha," "La Vigie de Koatven," and "Mathilde." He never conceived anything more brilliant than the Crao of the "Couratcha," the first volume of the "Vigie," the part of Ursule in "Mathilde," and that charming "Marquis de Létorière," which even up to the present day remains a masterpiece, notwithstanding the questionable sub-title he added to it afterwards "L' Art de Plaire." Unfortunately, he did not gain as much in character as he gained in talent by those associations. Those endowed with a powerful imagination are subject to outbursts of temporary defects, their imagination itself being the cause as well as its excuse. We ought not to judge poets as we judge other men. They are more easily wound up; they are easily seduced by mere glitter. The glitter of aristocratic society had too dazzling an effect upon Eugène Sue. He became as smitten with "people of quality" as if he were one of them. This modest writer gradually became a compound of the pretentious provincial nobleman and the ridiculous town dandy. He took not the slightest pride in the admirable talent of which he was possessed, but foolishly hankered after the title he did not possess. He had "his arms" emblazoned on his coach panels. In order to "enact the gentleman"

he pursued with his merciless and ever-ready sarcasm the bourgeois monarchy of Louis-Philippe, though accepting the invitations to the Duc d'Orléans' hunting parties, and he defended his inconsistency by an epigram: "I do not join his family, I only join his pack."

'Something still more incredible, this pitiless scoffer managed to become the laughing-stock of a number of young fellows who did not like him because women liked him too well, and who called him a parvenu. They jeered at his curled locks, at his showy clothes, at his pretentious airs, at his carefully studied laconism. He was fully aware of all this, the figure he "cut in society" caused him more pain than pleasure, and his invincible timidity added to his suffering, for, odd to relate, he was timid, so timid, in fact, as to be afraid to open his lips in the Chamber of which he became a member in '48. On one occasion, having to read a report, extending over half a page only, he requested one of his colleagues to make a noise while he was reading, so that he might not be heard. A gathering of women produced the same paralysing effect upon him. How often, when at supper by ourselves have I seen him stop in the midst of a perfect firework of epigram and smart sayings: "If I could only talk like this in society," he would exclaim; "for I fancy I have amused you, have I not? Well, the moment I am in a drawing-room, I am mute like a fish and idiotic like a goose." We may take it for

granted that he made up for his deficiency when tête-à-tête, for there could be no doubt as to his success with women. His face came to the aid of his wit and talent. Magnificent blue eyes, a splendid head of hair, black as jet, wonderfully arched eyebrows, denoting a great deal of character, beautiful teeth in a finely shaped mouth. Truth to tell, the whole was somewhat spoilt by a rather crooked, slightly upturned nose, of which he spoke in a pleasant way: "It's a great nuisance, I have got a common nose." But that nose was compensated for by his "grand" ways which dazzled women and proved the despair of men.

'Eugène Sue had not only an inborn taste for extravagant display of all kind, he had a genius for it. His mania for spending money sprang as much from his imagination as from his character. He invented opportunities for spending money, as he invented subjects for novels. The creative fertility which supplied his pen with a ceaseless flow of dramatic situations, original characters, poetical and graceful scenes, manifested itself in his daily life, in the inventions of feasts, banquets, furniture, carriages, and presents. He even amused himself now and again (for his impish tricks stuck to him throughout) by describing in his novels, jewels and furniture which it would have been impossible to realise, but in the attempted realisation of which his female admirers spent their best efforts and their last farthing.

‘ I am coming to a very delicate point. One of the most striking signs of the attainment of literary fame is, that the writer himself should be able to group around him a constituency of women, who follow him, not only as admirers, but as converts. They are a kind of Mary Magdalenes with this difference—that they are impenitent. Genius alone is not sufficient to obtain that kind of glory, it demands a particular genius, a genius in which the romantic element predominates, and in which reason does not dominate. Voltaire never had this glory, he had too much sound sense. People have never been able to say, “the women of Voltaire”; but there have been the women of Rousseau, the women of Chateaubriand, the women of Lamartine. Well, at one time we had also the women of Eugène Sue. The master to whom they attach themselves, marks them with his seal. The women of Rousseau were declamatory; the women of Chateaubriand were Christian and chivalrous, the women of Lamartine were a compound of religion and love; the women of Sue were sceptical, and, I am afraid, cynical. The brazen-faced license of his theories with regard to love and adultery, had its share in the empire he wielded over women. They loved him because he cast trouble into their minds and hearts, and as happens always, they carried their imitation to exaggeration. One of these wrote to him—I have seen the letter—“The same instinct of depravity attracts us to one

another." Another one, a "great lady," and very handsome, granted him an appointment at her own house. The clock strikes eleven, twelve, one, and these three hours had been spent by Eugène Sue in trying to convince his hostess of his overmastering passion for her, and entreating her to respond to it. All at once, his entreaties becoming too pressing, she stops him, and says in a freezing tone, "It is one o'clock in the morning; you have been alone with me for the last three hours, my servants are in the hall, your carriage is at my door; the vanity of both of us is satisfied, we had better proceed no further." And that woman was young, she was barely five-and-twenty. It has often been said that the literature of a period is the expression of its society; but a society is frequently the expression of its literature. Eugène Sue has exercised a very baneful influence over the small world that admired him. Better than anyone perhaps he has portrayed the deceits, the frivolousness, the elegance, the graceful qualities, and the corruptions of good society, but he has forgotten to depict its virtues. In his picture of the aristocracy, he has forgotten the aristocracy of the heart. It exists, nevertheless, and the charm, the grandeur, the truth of Jules Sandeau's novels, consists precisely in that beautiful reflected light of nobility, which he sheds on the brow of those young aristocratic girls of whom Mdlle. de la Seiglière is as it were the eldest sister.

‘We find nothing similar in Eugène Sue. He never knew how to paint an honest woman. The moment he makes her honest, he makes her a bore. Do you recollect that unbearable Mathilde, so justly eclipsed by that perverse Ursule. One day I told him laughing that he did not know his keyboard of virtue. How, in fact, could his pen have executed that gamut when his heart could not read it. I have known him to have liaisons which went to the verge of maddening passions. I have seen him weep, sob at the desertion of a mistress, at the treachery of a woman, but they always were Ursules. He wanted the ferment of vice in his love affairs. But at the same time and curious to relate, so intense is the craving of men of imagination for the idealistic that the moment he became enamoured of one of those creatures so unpoetical in themselves, he began to throw the glamour of poetry around her. I have read letters from him to one of these in which her “grand soul” was discussed to the exclusion of everything else. In his young days he had a mistress whose adventures had made her famous in the Parisian world, and who had so violent a temper that one day on his return home and while crossing the courtyard he narrowly escaped having his head smashed by a small table, which on further examination turned out to belong to him. He looks up and beholds the rest of his furniture coming the same way. The lady was in a rage and was adopting that novel style of removal. In spite of all this, he

moved heaven and earth to marry her. Finally, at fifty, he sent me some verses—the first he had ever written, I believe—in honour of a woman even more celebrated than the other, and whom he compared to the Virgin, though there was not the slightest connection between her and the dogma of the Immaculate Conception.’

Meanwhile my companion and I had arrived at a small seat well known to the visitors to the Stanislas fountain and situated in one of the most delightful spots in the forest. We sat down and I said to my interlocutor :—

‘I just thought of something which makes me feel very uncomfortable.’

‘What is it?’

‘I am afraid I gave you an unfavourable idea of Eugène Sue. I fancy I only painted him to you in his worst aspects. I feel like a kind of Cain killing his brother.’

‘I fully expect you’ll make up for it directly,’ he laughed. ‘Furthermore, you have shown me a trait in Eugène Sue’s character of which up till now I had been perfectly ignorant and which compensates for many defects—sincerity. It appears that there is not the slightest theatrical pose. He virtually does and says more against himself than his enemies could.’

‘You have hit off exactly one of the most delightful traits of Eugène Sue’s character. He was absolutely sincere, and that sincerity gave him the grace-

ful simplicity of a child. I repeat, of a child, for, however strange the thing may sound when applied to the author of "Mathilde" and "Atar Gull" there was something of the child about him. Like a child he was amiable and easily moved, he was apt to admire things like a child. He could coax like a child, he repented of his mistakes like a child ; which induced people to forgive him like a child ; in short that aggregate of defects naïvely admitted and of good qualities as naïvely overlooked made up one of the most fascinating characters I have ever known, and that particular charm adhered to him even in his transformation, of which I will now tell you.'

III

'A fell blow suddenly made an end of his life of luxury and worldly pleasures. I need scarcely tell you that I am referring to his financial collapse. In three or four years he had squandered everything, the fortune left to him by his father, a large inheritance besides, and the very considerable proceeds of his works. This misfortune only tightened our bonds of friendship. As in the case of Berlioz, my dear and happy home became his refuge. Every day about two he came, wan and despondent, begging me to shut my door to everyone, for a strange face was simply hateful to him ; and even after many years the recollection of the poor fellow choking with sobs goes to my very heart.'

‘You do not mean to tell me that at thirty-six he sobbed about the loss of money.’

‘Don’t judge him until you have heard everything. The loss of money was perhaps the least of his misfortunes. A few days after the crash, a woman whom he idolised and who was always twitting him with not loving her sufficiently, abruptly severed their connection, wrenching even the recollection of the happy past out of his heart. Nor was this all. Severely wounded in his affection, he felt himself at the same time mortally struck in his talent.

‘In the life of the artist there are certain critical moments which are either the tocsin of decline or the signal for a renewal of his intellectual existence. Racine has summed up that situation in one line. “A poet, who at forty, fails to find a fresh source of inspiration is, as a poet, dead.” That was the fate staring Eugène Sue in the face. He had exhausted the nautical novel, the novel of high society; he wanted a new sphere and he knew of no such a sphere, did not even perceive such a sphere dawning on his mental horizon. He felt his imagination to be foundering like everything else. His faculty of invention, his power for work was gone, new ideas refused to come. For hours he sat staring at the blank paper in front of him without being able to write a line. I fancy I can hear him say now in a tone of despair: “It’s all over with me, it’s all over with me. I cannot find anything, I shall not find

anything. Even the consolation of being able to work seems gone." In order to soothe him, his hostess, who in herself ought to have proved to him that a woman may be most charming and most virtuous at the same time, sat herself down at the piano and sang him some melodies of Schubert, whose first works had just appeared. Though he did not care for music as passionately as I did, it produced a certain effect on him, especially at that moment. The harrowed soul has that in common with the diseased physical organ that it becomes more keen and delicate of perception than in times of normal health, and often when he left us at night, we had the satisfaction of seeing him, if not more cheerful, at least more open to consolation.

‘An incident that happened in the family and a chance conversation had the effect of drawing him from this mental and moral torpor. Our little girl was struck down with a serious illness of which she was cured by an almost miraculous intervention. Was it the sight of our despair during those eleven days of mortal peril, or the intoxication of our joy during the period of her convalescence that produced the effect upon him? I cannot say, but everything he saw and heard in our home during that terrible crisis, contributed to stir his inmost heart. He began to understand that there are more terrible misfortunes than the loss of money, and the faithlessness of woman, or even the failure of the

imagination ; he almost blushed at his grief face to face with ours. Two of our friends, Goubaux and Schoelcher, came every evening to spend the night with us at the bedside of the poor little creature on the brink of death, and to help us in our ceaseless and desperate struggle against Death. Eugène Sue was deeply moved at this proof of their great friendship and claimed a share in their devotion. The sight of the child lying on her bed, with eyes closed, dishevelled locks, her face whiter than the pillow on which the head lay tossing, of the child which but a few days before had interrupted his brooding by her innocent prattle and joyful gambols took him out of himself. I need not enlarge upon this. When she recovered from her illness he seemed to recover from his. There had been a change of atmosphere with him, he had breathed a purer, more wholesome air. His heart drank in the dew of natural feelings and was refreshed, and I felt scarcely surprised when, one day, I heard him say to me ; “ I am recovering my taste for work. I fancy I have a feeling similar to that of the trees in March, beneath their bark. The sap is welling up. . . .” Then he added, for he was passionately fond of flowers, “ Decidedly, I believe I am going to belong to the species of rose-bushes that blossom twice. I’ll have a second crop. There’s one thing, however, that still worries me. I fail to find a subject.” “ Never mind, you’ll find one in the end.” “ Yes, but when ? Of late I have had

a kind of feeling which worries me, and which I scarcely dare confess to you." "Tell me." "You know the feeling: namely, that if there are women whom misfortune drives away, there are others whom it attracts." "The latter are the best." "Well, one of their best has come to me. She reminds me of that charming line of Shakespeare in Othello's speech to the Council: 'She loved me for the dangers I had passed, and I loved her that she did pity them.' Nevertheless, a bitter thought envenoms this commencement of bliss. I am going to show you a very black recess of my heart. Throughout the whole of my life, but especially during the last three years, I have professed a great contempt for women. I pretended to be a *roué*, I have assumed the mask of scepticism. Well, the mask has become the face, the play has become a terrible reality, and this reality, still further influenced by the treachery of which I have been the victim, has become a martyrdom. I find it impossible to deny the love of that young woman, I find it equally impossible to believe in it. She can have no interest in deceiving me, seeing that I am not worth a red cent. It makes no difference as far as I am concerned. All the while she is talking to me of her affection, I keep asking myself; 'Why does she talk to me like this? What is her idea? What can she expect to gain by it?' All this is simply horrible. Just imagine a man, who, while looking at the radiantly fresh face of a young

girl, tries to discover the skeleton behind the cheeks."

'I stopped him at once. "Well," I said, "you have been looking for a subject, here it is. A poignant, altogether novel subject. The sceptic punished by scepticism; it is the very subject that will suit you." "You think so?" "I feel certain. Study it carefully. Do like Goethe, paint the picture of your own disenchantment and perhaps you'll cure yourself of it in depicting it." He took my advice and studied so well that a fortnight later he had begun "Arthur" a work which, though showing a want of firmness invariably marking a work of transition, contains certain pages of powerful psychological analysis one would like to meet more often in his books. Besides, this new work took such strong hold of him that a little while after he came to me one day saying, "I am going to leave Paris, I cannot work here. I have collected some trifling debts here and there and am going to take up my quarters about ninety miles from Paris, in Sologne on the vast and barren property of one of my relatives, where I have arranged a kind of peasant's cottage for myself according to my own taste. I am going to be a hermit." In fact, three days afterwards he started for his hermit's retreat, but as a faithful chronicler, I am bound to say that he went in a post-chaise.

'We now come to Sue established in the country. One of the most curious traits of his character was

his powerful faculty for isolating himself, a faculty which as far as I am aware, no man of imagination possessed to the same degree. The long winters spent alone, far away from any human habitation, amidst the rocks and snow and dense woods, instead of depressing him, soothed and fortified his mind. In his retreat, the day was divided into two parts, nine hours of work, and four hours of walking or riding over the heather clad mountains or through the pine woods spreading far and wide on the horizon. Mounted on a small pony which he had got in exchange for a magnificent piece of silver plate and accompanied by a big grey-hound, a present from the Count D'Orsay, he looked like a figure of one of Scott's novels.

‘This was in 1841. You may remember that at that time, social problems, questions of pauperism, etc., began to exercise public opinion. There was a general preoccupation about and active sympathy with the condition, habits and hardships of the working classes, the people virtually engrossed everyone's imagination. Eugène Sue having returned to Paris an intelligent and enterprising publisher called upon him, and drew his attention to an illustrated English publication, both the illustrations and text of which dealt with a description of the mysteries of London. “A work of this kind dealing with Paris would stand an enormous chance of success,” he said. “Will you do it for me?” “An illustrated review,” replied

Eugène Sue. "I don't think I care about it; still if you like, I'll consider the matter."

'A little while afterwards, he sent me from the country whither he had returned, a small, brown, cardboard cover containing between two and three hundred slips of manuscript and accompanied by the following note, which I have carefully preserved.

"My good Ernest . . ."

'One moment. Before I proceed I must say a few words about that superscription, because it reminds me of one of the most delightful traits of Eugène Sue's character. He was very affectionate, I might say cajoling, with regard to the terms in which he addressed his friends. He never employed the commonplace "dear friend," he called you by your Christian name to which he always added the adjective "good." That's how he wrote to Schoelcher and to Pleyel; "My good Victor," "My good Camille." In his youth he became closely attached to a very clever writer; M. de Forge; he always called him "My good brother." My reason for insisting on this trifling detail is that it shows one of the best traits in his character, the trait, in fact, which proved his salvation. He was profoundly human and kind.

'And now, let us return to his letter. "My good Ernest," he wrote, "I herewith send you . . . I don't know what, but I want you to read it. It may be 'owlishly idiotic,' but the writing of it has afforded me a great deal of amusement; the question is, will it

amuse others to read it? Send me a line as soon as you can, giving me your opinion."

'I sat down and read. The first chapter was a kind of prologue which did not interest me much, but when the real novel began, when I came to the first, second, third and fourth chapters, I felt literally electrified; my hands that held the paper shook; I no longer read, I devoured. There was Fleur-de-Marie, the Chourineur, the Schoolmaster; in short it was the first half of the first volume of "Les Mystères de Paris." You may easily guess my reply. "It will be an enormous success, the greatest success you ever had. Send me the continuation as soon as you can." To which he replied: "Your answer has made me very happy, but as for the continuation, it would puzzle me to send it, seeing that I have not the remotest idea about it. I have written this from instinct, as it were, without knowing whither I was going. Now I am going to try and find out."

'And what do you think helped him to find out? A newspaper article. Almost immediately after the appearance of the first instalments of "Les Mystères de Paris" in the *Journal des Débats*, M. Considérant, the Editor-in-Chief of *La Démocratie Pacifique* drew attention to the novel as a genuine literary event. "I see whither the author is tending," he said. (He saw a good deal farther than the author himself). "He is entering upon a hitherto unexplored path. He is going to depict the hardships and the needs

of the working-classes. M. Eugène Sue has been christened the marine novelist, to-day he is called the people's novelist." The moment I had read the article, I sent it to Eugène Sue. "Thank you," came the reply, "I have been to see the writer of the article, and I can see my way clear now."

'From that day forth Eugène Sue led a new life. He plunged into the lower strata of society as he had flung himself into the higher. Instead of the pink and top-boots, instead of the button entitling him to join the King's hunt, instead of the camellia in the buttonhole, he donned a cap, a pair of highlows and a blouse, and went in the evening on foot to the Faubourgs, to the wine-shops beyond the barrières, to the workmen's meetings, to their lodging-houses, to their hovels, to the hospitals, living the life of the populace, "hobnobbing" with them in their dens; letting his imagination, as it were, dive into the very depths of all this wretchedness, of all this hatred against their betters, of all this devotion to their own.'

'Allow me to interrupt you for a moment,' said my companion; 'allow me to interrupt you in order to ask you to explain something which you incidentally mentioned just now, and which seems to me incomprehensible.'

'What was it?'

'It was to the effect that the author, when he began "*Les Mystères de Paris*," did not know whither

he was going. Am I to understand that all those characters so vigourously put before us, were simply proceeding at random without a predetermined aim?’

‘Exactly. That was Sue’s process throughout. He was simply guided by accident. When he commenced to write a novel, he practically took a ticket in a lottery. It was not he who governed his pen, it was his pen that carried him along with it. The letters, the words springing up under his pen were like so many mysterious signs, telling him to go this or that way. His ink was a kind of magic ink, it inspired him. On one or two occasions the chief character of his novel, the mainspring of his dramatic action was only invented by him at the end of a volume, or by sheer accident. Do you remember Rodin in “Le Juif Errant”?’

‘Do I remember him? Why he is the most original character in the book, the pivot of the whole.’

‘Well, this pivot of the action, he only found it in the thick of the action. One evening when he was finishing his day’s work and writing the last lines of a chapter, all at once, without his ever having known why or how, the silhouette of that type of Jesuit, unsavoury, reeking with dirt, chaste, on which the whole work hangs, started from his paper.’

‘You really do astonish me. I was under the impression that every work of the imagination, in order to be powerful, must be a work thoroughly

thought out, in which each part, each detail should be arranged beforehand, in view of its general conception and final aim.'

'This is perfectly true with regard to dramatic works, for they are, before all things, works of combination; all the subordinate parts tend to one common aim. One of the first scenes the dramatic author is bound to find, is the final scene of his play, that is, the *dénouement*, towards which tend all the actions and almost every word of his *dramatis personæ*. This is not the case with the novel. The author has a certain latitude in the way of digression, episodical scenes. He is allowed to wander away for a little while from his subject, to amuse himself on the road, provided he amuses us at the same time. I could quote this or that master of fiction who has often begun like Eugène Sue, without knowing whither he was going. As for Sue himself, he was absolutely incapable of drawing up a plan or sketching a scenario. The reason of his never having written a play was precisely because it would have wanted composing. An effort at combination would have killed his inspiration. It was the uncertainty, the confusion created by his own method which spurred him on and excited him. Does it seem credible to you that, in his big novels, he has frequently at the end of an instalment left his characters in a position from which it was impossible to extricate them. Mind, said instalment had to appear next day, and

the next instalment on the next day, and yet, he was at an absolute loss what to put in that latter number. In such an emergency I was almost sure to get a note in hieroglyphics; "My good Ernest. I am absolutely 'stuck fast'; read the instalment herewith; for the life of me I do not know how to extricate my personages from that position. I'll be with you at six, we'll dine and put our heads together after dinner." "You unhappy wretch," I greeted him on his arrival, "why do you persist in plunging yourself into such difficulties?" "Ah, why indeed," was the answer. "You know well enough why, simply because I cannot do otherwise." "But I have just read your infernal instalment; and there is no possible means of getting your characters out of the hole you have put them into." "Well, never mind, we'll get them out for all that," he used to answer, remaining admirably cool. "Let us try to argue the matter out for a moment. Suppose a couple or a number of living men and women were to get into a similar position. They would get out of it, wouldn't they? By hook or by crook, but out of it they would get. Well, let us try to find out what they would do."

'Thereupon we began talking, discussing, suggesting; Sue's mind brimming over all the while with odd fancies and its owner interrupting himself now and then in remarks such as these: "Can you imagine anything more amusing than to enact the part of Providence,

of Dame Fortune, in the way I am doing, to create human specimens of happiness, or wretchedness as the case may be ; to ruin one, to enrich another, to bestow the woman he worships on a poor young fellow who has not the remotest expectation of such a thing. It is that idea which induced me to create Rodolphe in ‘*Les Mystères de Paris*.’ Rodolphe is a novelist practically enacting his fiction ; but I have the advantage in two respects over him. First, I have the power of life and death over my personages ; secondly, I know no more than they do what is going to happen to them.”

‘That was how, after two or three hours of intellectual effervescence and turning over of ideas, he went away, composed and having found his expedient.’

‘You promised me the picture of an extraordinary being, and you have undoubtedly kept your promise,’ remarked my companion. ‘But after all, up till now, I have only caught sight of the democrat of imagination. Where is the democrat of conviction? He has simply changed his model. He portrays working men after having portrayed duchesses ; there is nothing unusual in that. Nearly every artist has done as much.’

‘Well, I am going to show you something which not one of them has done.’

IV

‘Work had brought success once more, success had brought him money, and money enabled him to

resume his elegant and comfortable life. A small dwelling house in the Rue de la Pépinière, converted into a charming cottage full of flowers, satisfied both his needs in the way of material well-being and his love of luxurious surroundings, which though artistic to a degree were essentially of the world worldly. His society had undergone a transformation similar to that of his talent, the duchesses had been replaced by a number of familiars more serious in their tendencies. Once a month Schoelcher, Goubaux, Camille Pleyel and I dined with him. That was what he called his quartet of friends. Quartet was the fit word, for each of us represented as it were a different instrument. Schoelcher contributed to the entertainment by the judicious ventilation of those inflexible principles of honour and liberty which, combined with his passionate love of art and his chivalrous courtesy, invested that champion of the black race with the nameless something of a "cross-breed" between a Spartan and Athenian. Goubaux brought to our board those universal and sympathetic intellectual qualities which made him the founder of the system of professional education in France, while it enabled him at the same time to write two such plays as "Le Joueur" and "Richard Darlington." As for Camille Pleyel—'

'One moment, was that Pleyel the maker of pianos?'

'The very man, and you may take it for granted

at once that no musical instrument ever left his workshops which was more harmoniously attuned than his own soul. He was endowed with all the seductive qualities we admire in the artist, he had all the generous feelings the artist is generally credited with. A pianist of the first water, a pupil of Steibelt, the teacher had imparted to the pupil all the grand traditions and the styles of the great masters. Chopin often said : " There is only one man left who knows how to play Mozart's music, that's Pleyel, and when I can induce him to play a sonata *à quatre-mains* with me, I look upon it as a lesson I am taking."

'As I' have told you, Eugène Sue had a natural taste for music, in order to gratify it Pleyel gave him a set of bells, which produced a perfect accord, to hang round the necks of his cows in Sologne. Pleyel's conversation teemed with interesting recollections of the great musicians. He had heard Beethoven improvise on the piano. The story in itself is curious, and as in this instance I am not a dramatic author, and consequently allowed to digress, I trust you will not mind hearing it. One day at Vienna a great concert which will be wound up with an impromptu performance by Beethoven is advertised in the papers. As a matter of course, Pleyel finds his way to it with his father. At the time appointed, the great composer appears on the platform, sits down to the piano, runs his fingers over the keyboard, and

strikes a few chords, then suddenly interrupts himself to begin something else, which he abandons as quickly, and after a few more minutes of abortive attempts, rises from his music stool, bows to the audience and disappears. I leave you to imagine the angry disappointment of the public. For a whole day, Viennese society talked of nothing else but the "scandalous behaviour of Beethoven." Next morning Pleyel's father says to his son, "Let us go and see Beethoven." When they get to Beethoven's place, the young fellow is absolutely quaking, both with admiration and fear, for he is not at all certain of finding the great master in a good temper. "Oh, it's you," says Beethoven, the moment they enter the room. "Were you at the concert yesterday?" "Yes." "Well, what did the idiots say? I suppose they called me an unmannerly brute. They probably imagine that improvising on the piano is like making a pair of boots, that when once you know how to do it, you can always do it. I came with the most excellent intentions, I tried, but the inspiration refused to come. I could not help it, and the only thing left for me to do, was to take my hat and go; that's what I did do. They may growl as much as they like."

'He had remained standing all the while by the side of his piano, apparently very nervous and fidgetty, his left hand mechanically, unconsciously striking the keys, one note after another, sometimes

with one finger, then with two or three. Gradually and without appearing to notice it himself, without interrupting his conversation, all the fingers of the left hand begin to do their work, the notes follow quickly upon one another, there is the vague outline of a melody, and at the same time a change comes over the face, the pauses in his talk grow longer and more frequent, the tone is no longer in harmony with the word itself. A few minutes more and he is fairly seated at the piano, having the whole of the instrument under control, he is no longer conscious of anyone being near, his face is flushed, he bends over the keyboard, there is a rush of melody, the piano itself becomes a living thing and Camille Pleyel beholds the never-to-be-forgotten sight of a great man suddenly seized by the genius that is within him, of a great man in the throes of giving birth to a masterpiece, and dropping back at the end, quivering, utterly exhausted. Pleyel himself was most admirable when he recounted that scene ; the play of his features, the inflections of his voice conjured up a vivid image of Beethoven. But with Pleyel the artist was only part of the man, his business capabilities were of a very high order, and his sympathy with Eugène Sue prompted him to endeavour to insure him a comfortable provision for his old age. He made himself his business manager, and the task was not easy. Eugène Sue's extravagance soon plunged him into money difficulties once more, into debt, into bill

transactions, and he was threatened with ruin for the second time. Camille Pleyel on his own authority provided him with an informal council of supervision, consisting of himself, Goubaux and myself. We laid hands on every penny he earned, granted him a monthly allowance, reduced his unnecessary expenses, provided for the discharge of all his debts by instalments, until the whole of the debts had been discharged. Sue submitted to all this with the delightful docility of a child. His sacrifices were rendered more easy to him by the growing success of his works and his increasing influence over the lower classes. He wielded, as it were, a kind of sovereign power over the Parisian proletariat. Each chapter as it appeared was hailed with expressions of the most ardent sympathy, with most grateful enthusiasm. Both sympathy and enthusiasm frequently manifested themselves in the strangest and most tragic fashion. One evening, on his return home and the hall being in darkness his foot knocked against something suspended from the wall. He lights a candle and beholds the feet of a man who had managed to slip in—it was never known how—and who had hanged himself. His hand held a small note, couched as follows:—"Utter despair makes me kill myself, but I fancy that death will be less hard if I can die beneath the roof of him who cares for and defends us." This fanaticism with regard to Sue, dated from the publication of a

chapter which perhaps you recollect ; the story of the Morel family.'

'Morel, the diamond setter,' exclaimed my companion. 'Of course I recollect the lost diamond and the despair of that honest man who is accused of having stolen it, of course I recollect the eviction of the whole family. It is one of the best chapters in *Les Mystères de Paris*.'

Well, here is the post-scriptum to that chapter. The story happened in the end of February. Two or three days before, Eugène Sue had finished that chapter and read it to us. We simply cried like so many children. On the 25th, Pleyel had given Sue 1800 francs to pay an acceptance due on the 28th. On that evening we went to dine with Sue and almost immediately after our arrival, Pleyel says to Sue: "Did the man come, and where is the bill?" Thereupon Sue began to stammer and look confused; then in his caressing voice he said, "My good Camille, you must not be vexed, but . . ." "You did not pay the bill," cries Pleyel, leaving him no time to finish the sentence. "I was going to tell you, my good Camille, it was . . ." "It was what. Some new piece of extravagance on your part. Really you are unbearable, I am going, I am not going to dine here." And suiting the action to the word, Pleyel gets up in order to go. "Don't go, my good Camille, stop, I couldn't help myself." "Which simply means that you could not resist some sudden whim. What

new piece of furniture or old silver has bereft you of your senses this time? I can see what it is; Froment-Meurice came and showed you . . .” “Not at all, my good Camille; Froment-Meurice has not been near the place, and I have bought nothing.” “Then how did you spend the money?” “Well, I would rather not tell you.” “But I intend to know, and in spite of you,” says Pleyel, and raising his voice, he shouts, “Laurent, Laurent.” Sue’s servant answers the summons. “Who has been to see monsieur to-day?” asks Pleyel. “A poor joiner, monsieur, who is in business for himself. He came with his wife and children. They were going to seize his furniture, and his debtors were going to make him a bankrupt. The poor fellow was crying fit to break his heart and monsieur gave him the 1800 francs.”

‘We looked somewhat sheepish. When the servant had disappeared, Eugène Sue went on in a low voice and looking very confused also: “My good Camille, that poor fellow was the incarnation of honesty. There was not the slightest doubt about his character or about his distress, both were vouched for by M. B. whom you know and of whom you have a very high opinion. Those 1800 francs saved him from ruin and disgrace.” “It’s all very fine to be charitable,” said Pleyel, still growling and with the severity of the business man, “but before being generous one must pay one’s debts; generosity is to a certain extent a luxury, the conscientious discharge of

one's liabilities is a duty. The man to whom you owe those 1800 francs is perhaps anxiously waiting for them himself. The pleasure of being a benefactor is all very well, but I doubt whether one ought to indulge in such when one has liabilities of one's own."

'Eugène Sue hung his head as he sat listening to him, then he said, "We must not be too hard-hearted, my good Camille. The truth is, that I could not help myself. Just judge for yourself. On that very morning they brought me the proofs of the chapter on Morel. While I was correcting them, it seemed to me that that chapter was also a promise to pay, and that after having signed it, I had no right to send away empty-handed an honest man who was in sore distress." At these simple words, the tears came into our eyes also, and Pleyel caught both his hands in his. "You are right, Eugène. I fancy you are a better man than either of us, and as for your creditor, I'll see that he does not worry you." '

'That's how Sue's imagination transformed his soul,' I said to my companion, who seemed deeply moved by my story. 'That's how charity and the desire to help his fellow-creatures entered his veins and became part of his life's blood. It was the author who converted the man to his gospel. That conversion has been attributed to democratic ideas, to policy ; his acts themselves are sufficient to deny the charge. From the moment he set foot on the road to Damascus, he went to the end, that is, he neither

stopped at sacrifices, nor at voluntary exile. Elected to the Chamber in 1848, he took his seat among the "lefts," and on the first day, from a feeling of admiration, seated himself by the side of an illustrious poet. While he was chatting with his neighbour, the Chamber was discussing a bill of some kind, and in a little while the poet to his great surprise, held up his hand, then rose from his seat and voted. "Did you hear what the last speaker said?" asked Eugène Sue. "I did not hear a single word." "Then how can you possibly vote?" "Oh, that's easy enough; do you see that little gentleman with spectacles facing you?" "Yes." "Well, it's he who virtually tells me which way to vote. As we are invariably of a different opinion, I remain seated if he gets up, and when he remains seated I get up on trust. He listens for both of us."

'Eugène Sue refused to look upon political life in that light. He brought all his ardent and strongly convinced feelings to bear upon it. On the day of the Coup d'État he protested energetically against the decrees and M. de Morny placed his name on the list of representatives to be arrested. Napoléon himself put his pen through it, remembering that Eugène Sue was his mother's godson. Sue declined to profit by that clemency and in company with other deputies, gave himself up at the Fort of Vanves. At the promulgation of the "law of exile" Eugène Sue looked in vain for his name on the list. Louis-

Napoléon had struck it off a second time, and equally for the second time Eugène Sue declined the favour which he regarded as an insult and went into voluntary exile. He went to Annecy, where he lived for three years, working all the while, proclaiming his republican opinions louder and louder each day, carrying, according to me, his radical theories to excess, but correcting his theories by his actions, and devoting part of the proceeds of his works to the alleviation of the wretchedness of all kind he beheld around. Eugène Sue the sceptic, Eugène Sue the scoffer and materialist, though he had not become a Catholic, gave every year a considerable sum to the vicar of Annecy for his poor. What had converted Eugène Sue? Without a doubt, his own works.'

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